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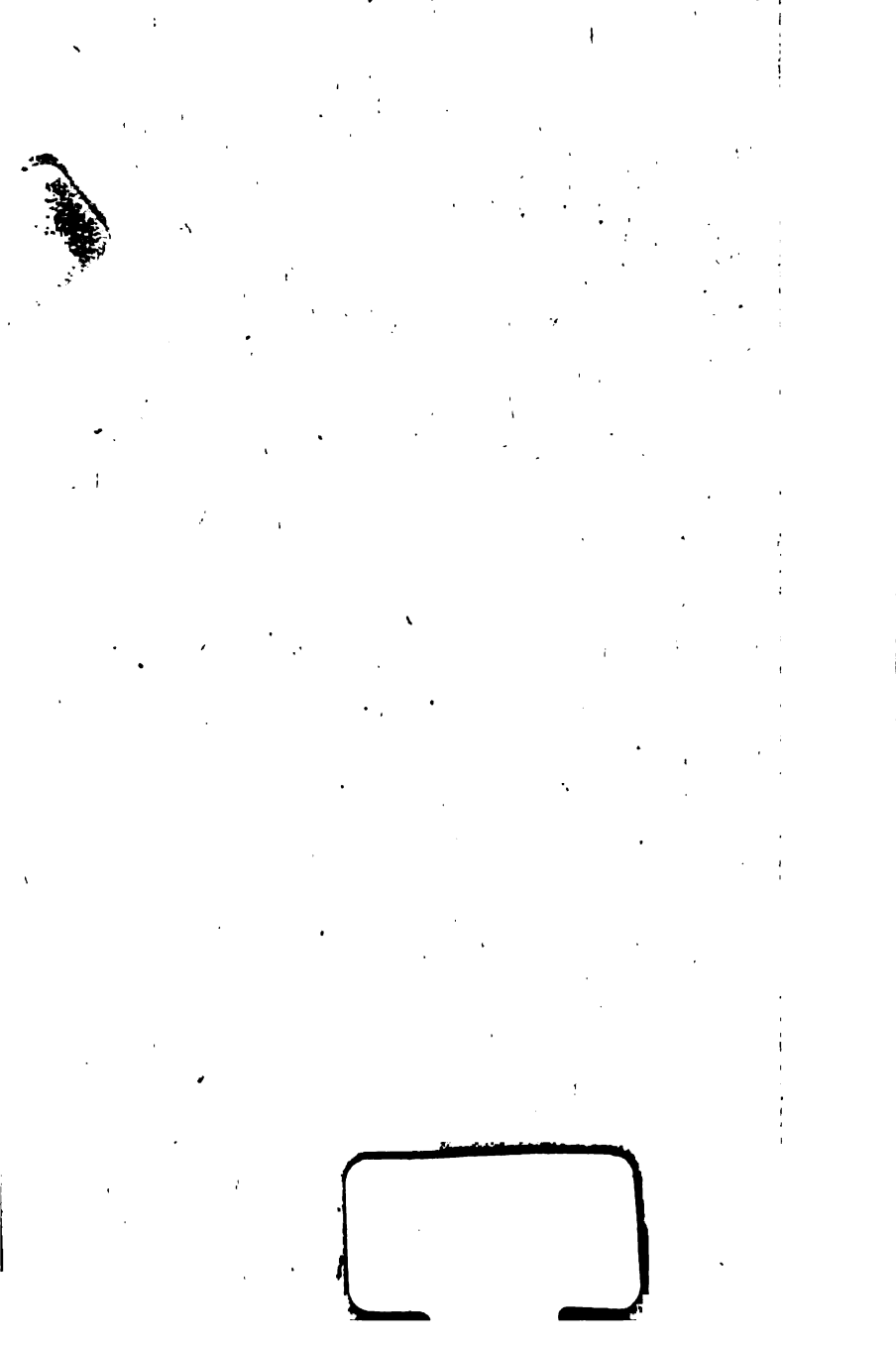
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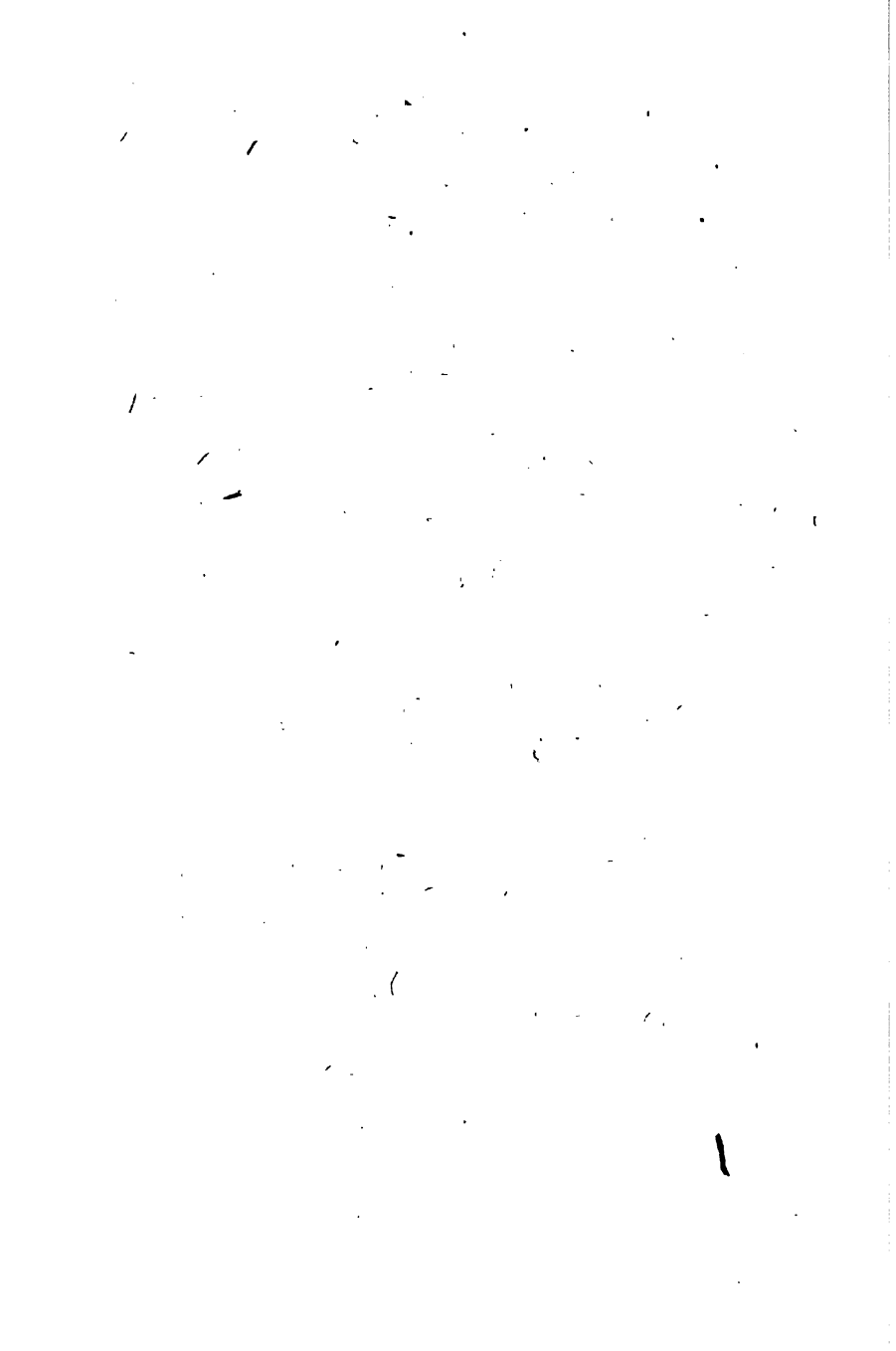
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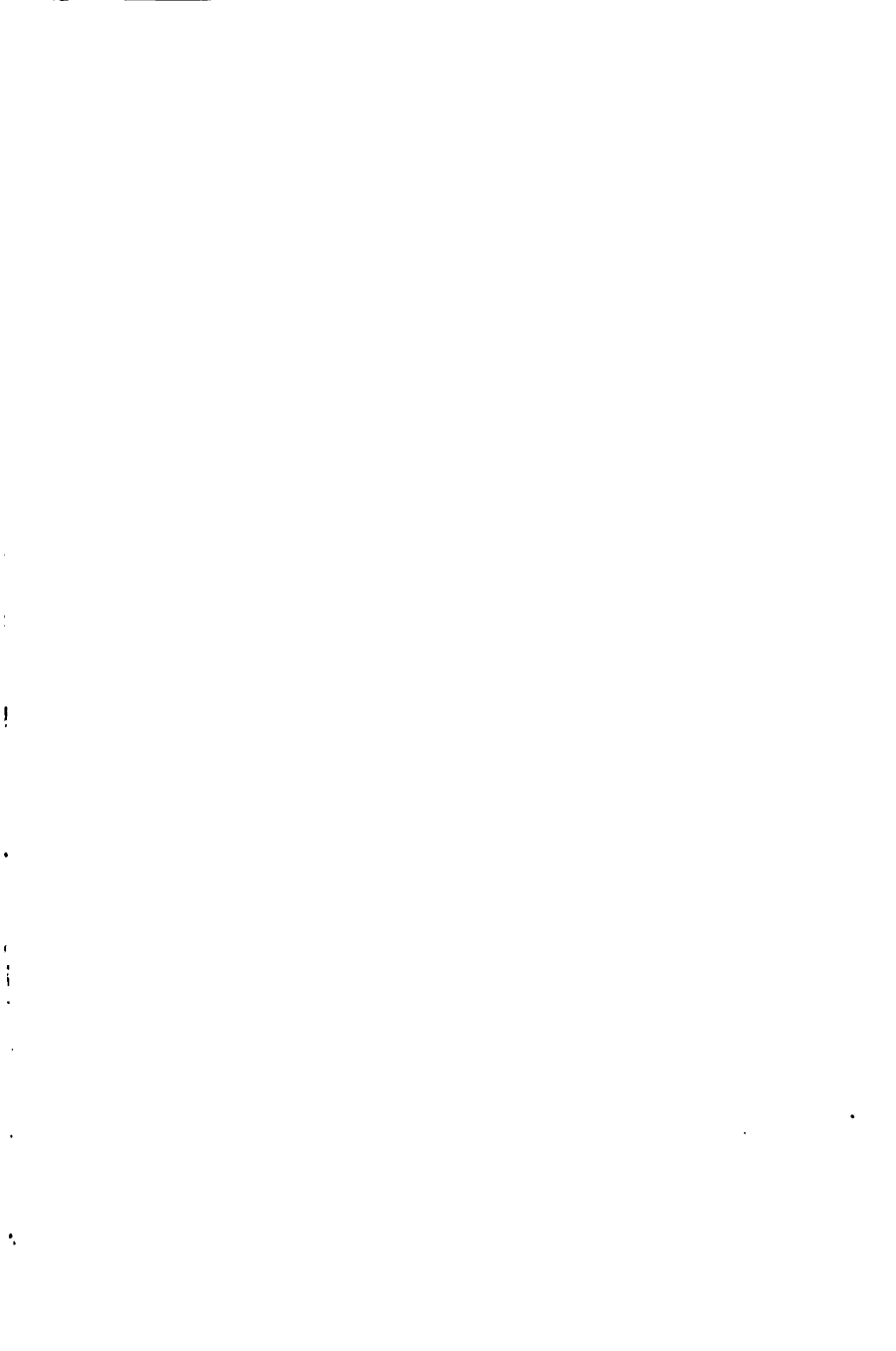


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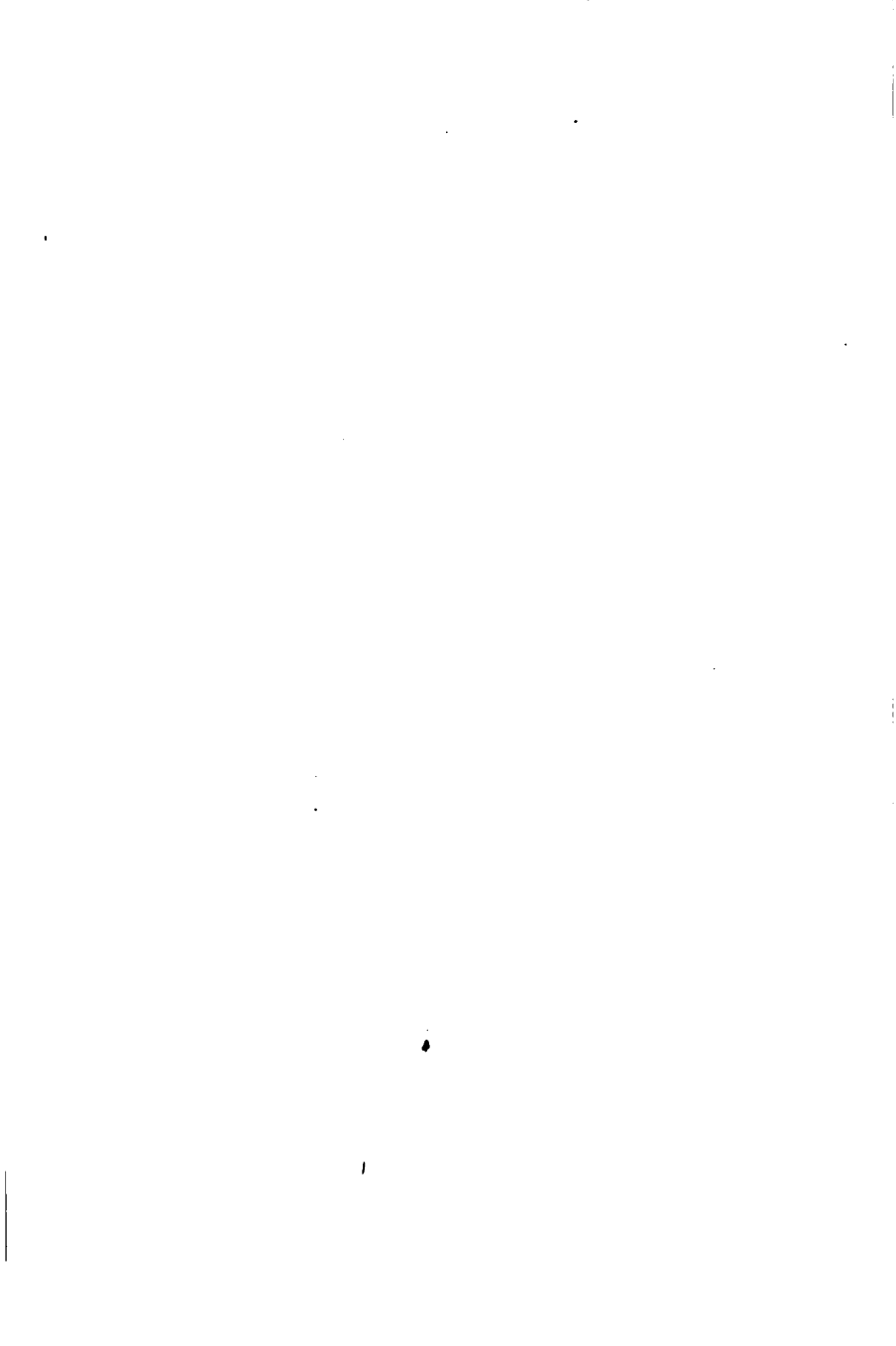


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A DAUGHTER OF THE STATES





" ' I DON'T BELIEVE YOU ARE TELLING ME THE TRUTH ' "

Not
VI-

A Daughter of The States

By Max Pemberton

Author of "The Garden of
Swords," "The Gold Wolf," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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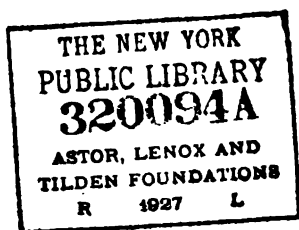
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A Daughter of the States

CHAPTER I

"THE GREATEST OF THESE THREE"

“**T**HE man’s a rogue!”

And thus doing justice to his conscience and his convictions, the reverend gentleman pressed his fingertips softly together and beamed upon so much of the world as may be seen from the promenade deck of an ocean steamship.

“I do not say,” he continued, after a little pause, “that I speak either from personal knowledge or the definite information of others. Far from it. I am merely an observer. There are some characters so transparent that they cannot hide even their defects from us. Such a man is that fellow yonder. His very footstep is open to suspicion; the stoop of his shoulders is the first letter of his alphabet. His eyes say, ‘Someone is looking at me. I know it—I am a rogue.’ He does not complain because his fellow-passengers avoid him. Why should he? He understands the justice of it. He is clever or he would not be a rogue. The attention that we pay him is a compliment. There are few sufficiently strong-minded

to turn their eyes when vice in its more attractive shapes passes their windows. For my own part, I surrender at discretion. I admire the man as I admire Nature in her more humble moods. He fascinates me. If I were a woman, I should believe that he would presently devour me."

He laughed in a deep sonorous voice, which expressed self-satisfaction and no little sense of condescension. Jessie Golding gathered up her skirts to let the Rogue pass, although her clear eyes followed him steadfastly.

"I wonder if his ears burned," she said in a low voice. "Anyway, he must be used to it. The ship's done nothing but talk about him for two days. He couldn't have had more notice if he'd been Theodore Roosevelt himself. I suppose you call him a rogue because you don't know anything about him? That's charity, isn't it?"

Her interest centred upon the tall, stooping figure of the Rogue as it rested for a minute before the door of the smoking-room, and she scarcely heard the vicar (as she had come to call the Reverend St. John Trew) when that substantial worthy began to defend himself.

"We are all rogues in a sense," he was good enough to admit. "The more attractive our public position, the more amiable is the roguery we practise. Doctors, lawyers, politicians especially, must be rogues to succeed. Believe me, my dear Miss Golding, I never enter a strange pulpit to beg for a new parsonage but I say to myself, 'Rogue, your tongue is cheating them.'"

"And does it?" Jessie asked quickly, though she answered her own question before he could reply.

"Why, yes, I'm sure it does," she rattled on. "You make them feel that heaven has kept the roof open just that they may slate it. Oh, I know: they bring a quarter and give two dollars before you have done. Isn't that it, Mr. Trew? They book all the front seats in paradise, and then go home to dinner. I've done it myself, and I did feel good—until I wanted the money next day. Then I said things I was sorry for. Oh, I'm sure your roguery is beautiful."

The vicar of Sackville Street folded his hands in an attitude of benevolent righteousness.

"I complain of the third hymn," he said reflectively. "If we could collect the offertory while the special preacher is actually in the pulpit the custom would be beneficial, I am sure. There are some things, alas! which belong to the kingdom of dreams. An offertory bag without threepenny pieces is one of them."

"And rogues—they are facts, of course? I saw you cast down your eyes while he passed. Did you feel very brave about it? I didn't. I think I was a little bit sorry."

"It is the mission of your sex to be the agents of compassion. You admire virtue in men, but avoid it. I am quite sure that every woman on the ship is saying in her heart, 'Poor fellow!' If our Rogue were a missionary returned from the heathen, the young ladies would say, 'How dull!' while the men would ask what he made out of it. Observe, your Rogue, having

wrestled with temptation for precisely twenty seconds, is now asked to play poker again. The lamb will be bleating somewhere near. That is the habit of lambs—they imitate a gentler creature and admire rogues. Their fleece, like yours, is offered at his feet. When they are shorn they expect sympathy and do not get it. We know that they will return to the Rogue whenever he calls them."

He brushed some blacks from the book which was open upon his knee, and turned to regard his companion critically. Jessie's head rested upon the rail of her deck chair. The fresh breeze had caught her flaxen curls and blown them awry; the sea heightened her colour and gave a sparkle to her eyes. While she was not quite sure whether the vicar bored or annoyed her, she would give him ten minutes to answer the question. Few men were worth more than that.

"Now, see, Mr. Trew," she exclaimed, putting on a manner and a drawl quite foreign to her, "are you aware that I'm to be married in fifteen days?"

"My dear young lady, do the American papers leave one unaware of anything at all?"

"Then you know all about it?"

"Er—hem—I understand that the world calls you very fortunate."

"Yes. But suppose—well, suppose I were a lamb?"

"Impossible to suppose any such thing."

"I'm going to marry Lord Eastry, you know."

"A charming man. One of our oldest families."

"Yes; but I'm not marrying his family—I'm marrying him."

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"His name has been much before the public lately."

"In the Bankruptcy Court. Isn't it nice of him?"

"Really, I had quite forgotten it. But we rely upon America to get us out of these little difficulties. You will live at Monkton Castle, of course? That, let me see, is at present, I think, in the hands of the—the Meyersteins."

"It's something with a 'Stein' in it. My father says they're Jews. I suppose they might be. Well, now, is Monkton very beautiful, Mr. Trew?"

"Quite a show place. I paid a shilling to see it last year. The caretaker is evidently a dissenter. He ignored my card——"

"Shall I have a great staircase and a statue of the fourth baron of something in the hall and a suit of armour to look at when I go to bed?"

"All these things are to be found at Monkton."

"The chapel's a synagogue now, I suppose? That's a pity, isn't it? I think I'll make it Catholic. We bought some holy pictures in Rome last year. Do you know what religion Lord Eastry is? When I asked him he said, 'Rats.'"

"Hem! His Lordship's religion is, undoubtedly, the church of his fathers."

"Did they have a church, then? How interesting! I thought they only drank port wine. They'll all be my fathers now, won't they? And I shall be able to look at their pictures and call them 'poppa.' Oh! I feel quite an old family myself, and I'm only twenty-four."

"In another ten years age will not be so kind to your conscience."

"You mean I'll have to lie about it. Well, I don't think I will. Age should speak for itself. If a woman looks twenty, she is thirty. It's no good saying anything else. I read your age in a gossip-book downstairs. I wouldn't tell it you for the world. Men are much sillier that way than women. You'd hate me for the rest of the voyage."

"My dear Miss Golding! As if it were possible for any man alive to forget so charming a companion! Tell me my age, by all means. I am fifty-three, and proud of it. Time and golf deal gently with me. That is for your own ear. You are one of those thrice-blessed creatures to whom a man tells everything. We do not exchange lockets with our lady friends nowadays; we exchange secrets. I have told you more since we came on board this ship together than I have told any woman in my life, my own mother excepted. If the confidence would hang me I should still be quite comfortable. You would never betray it."

"Are you sure of it? But I'd have to talk—we Americans must talk, you know. I never met an American girl who could go through a whole five minutes without saying 'My!' and you never met one, either. A man who won't talk back makes me tired. You English sometimes seem as though you'd said everything you wanted to say a hundred years ago, and couldn't begin all over again. There's a man on my right at table who never gets further than 'Really!'

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How very interesting! He must have said it two hundred and forty times since he came aboard. I'd like to put him in a dime museum as a specimen of a tired Englishman."

"Spare the race which you are about to honour. We are a reserved people, principally because we have been taught to believe ourselves better than other people. America talks because she is always wanting to learn. I grant that loquacity is generally honest, though it is often shallow. When a man is very silent he is a great thinker, a great fool, or a great rogue. You see, we return to the original subject—the Rogue, our own particular Rogue."

"I wonder if he's winning to-day?"

"Study the Lamb at dinner and you will be answered."

"He sits at the purser's table. I can only see his back."

"Thrice unfortunate. We must try again. There is Mr. Bentham, for instance."

"What! The 'Bantam'! Oh, the dear little china-doll!"

"Who has been gazing at you with rapture for the last ten minutes. Let me grant him a stool in my paradise. My religion teaches me self-sacrifice——"

"And golf. Well, make him come right here, and I'll pat his little hand. He says he's a lawyer, doesn't he? I shouldn't have thought his poor little hands were large enough to steal anything."

The vicar said, "Please—please!" and went over to bring the professed gossip to the place. Percy

Bentham was certainly far from being a "fine man," for he stood no more than five feet in his shoes, and his monstrous ears and clumsy hands serve to emphasise a deficiency of nature's gifts elsewhere. Jessie had christened him the "Bantam" before they steamed out of the harbour. His pertinacity was as remarkable as his memory for unpleasant facts. He could tell you something disgraceful about half the great families of Europe.

"The Rogue's playing poker again," he began, without waiting to be asked. "Oh, yes; I thought you'd like to know. He won fifty-two pounds on the last hand—a full. A man like that will get shot some day. Of course, the Lamb is losing."

"And all you great strong men permit it!" cried Jessie indignantly. "I'm ashamed of you, vicar! Why don't you do something?"

"Behold! I am reading a yellow back."

The "Bantam" coughed a little reproachfully.

"My dear Miss Golding," he said, "have confidence in me. I promise you it shall all end well."

"That's what they say when they lynch a man in Kentucky."

"Really, now, Miss Golding, why do you dislike that man so?"

"Because it's the fashion."

"And yet you have never spoken a single word to him."

"Perhaps I shouldn't dislike him if I had—he just haunts me. I see his face in my dreams—when I have any."

"You do dream, then? How interesting! I never had anyone dream about me."

"You're not wicked enough."

The vicar laughed contentedly.

"Virtue sleeps for ten hours," he said blandly.

"You must commit a crime, Mr. Bentham."

"That's what I've been trying to do all my life."

"But you won't succeed," said Jessie. "You haven't the pluck for it. Look at the Rogue now. You shiver when he passes you—you seem to feel that he is covering up a dreadful story which would make your flesh creep."

The "Bantam" wagged his head knowingly.

"You'll know all about it when we go ashore at Liverpool," he said sagely.

"Then it's really true that he is in trouble? Everyone says so."

"Time will show," said the "Bantam," and he went off to watch the poker party.

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT GOD CHANCE

THE Rogue took his seat at a corner table in the smoking-room upon the upper deck of the *Jersey City*, and Herbert Laidlaw, the "Lamb," sat opposite to him in the angle of the lounge. The others of the party were well known upon the ships of the Red Star Line—Richard Marx, the greatest poker player in Albany City, and Bertrand Sedgwick, who, as many said, was neither more nor less than his confederate in rascality. If men wondered that such experts should sit down with the Rogue, they believed at the same time that the aims of three, at least, of the party were identical. Many stories were afloat of the fortune and the folly of the freckled, pale-faced youth whom the Rogue had enticed to his cabin; but in one surmise all agreed. His friends of the *Jersey City* would fleece him to the last farthing; they would not leave him the price of a railway ticket when he landed at Liverpool. Some of the more friendly even offered their advice, or whispered a hesitating word of warning; but the answer was always the same—"I know what I am doing. Murray West is all right."

Now Murray West was the Rogue's *nom de voyage*, for heaven alone knew what his true name might be; and while he could inspire such confidence it was ob-

viously vain to withstand him. Believing that the "Lamb" was already grown for the shearing, the wise ones went their own way and left him to the penalties of that denuding process. They were good enough to grant you that the few words they had exchanged with the Rogue were neither uninteresting nor altogether wasted, for while one would say that the man had been a gentleman, another condescended to admit that his daring as a card-player was quite extraordinary. Such a testimonial did not further that desire of privacy which the card-players chiefly desired. There were occasions when quite an audience watched the game from afar; and nothing but the Rogue's obstinate refusal to play anywhere else but in the smoking-room of the ship prevented an early adjournment to the stateroom he had engaged.

"Let us have elbow room," he said, drily. "I like to see my opponents' hands."

"That's an offensive observation," Marx, the Jew, had retorted. But the Rogue made no apology.

"I don't withdraw it," he had said. "If you want to play, call for the cards. If you don't want to play, go and sing hymns. It's the same thing to me."

It ended invariably by the gamblers eating their words and calling for fresh cards. In their own cabin they told each other that they had "struck a snag," to which lamentable calamity the confederate Sedgwick added that of the possible prey of which they had been deprived.

"I never dealt a single pack out of my breeches last night," he said, gloomily. "The man's got the eyes

of a hawk; you can feel his fingers itching for your throat. What was it he took of the English dude last night? A pretty considerable hat full, I know."

"It was five hundred and fifty pounds—that I know, for I totted it up. Our money, chum, blast him! I'll be drowned if I don't give him a push some night. This steamer ain't worth drink money while he's aboard."

"Well, we'll see what's going this afternoon—I'm crying off if it's no better than yesterday. It's sinful to think what that dude might have been worth to us if this cargo had been left in the quay. A herring-backed, lean-boned son of a British hog! I'll get even before I'm through with him."

They adjourned to the smoking-room in this amiable mood, and finding Laidlaw, the dude in question, ready and waiting, they sat down in the unexpected belief that the prey would be theirs alone, and that none would dispute it with them. In this, however, they were pathetically premature, for they had scarcely called for the cards before the Rogue appeared upon the scene and at once took his accustomed chair. Jessie Golding, as we know, had rewarded him with her interest while he hesitated for a moment upon the threshold of the smoking-room; but neither she nor the "Bantam" understood how very much was at stake in that particular game.

Richard Marx looked up swiftly when the Rogue entered, and said something under his breath. His companion swallowed a hasty oath and cut the cards with an adroit hand, which appeared to cover a trick

prepared. Herbert Laidlaw fidgeted uneasily in his chair. The smoking-room steward carried three cock-tails to the table, which he dusted with an acquired flip, entirely ineffective, but undoubtedly pretty.

"Shall I bring another?" he asked the Rogue.

The answer was "No," in so fierce a tone that the man skimmed away muttering. Richard Marx, a dark-visaged, bearded Jew, with a diamond ring upon the middle finger of his left hand and a turquoise upon the little finger of his right, took up the cards sulkily, and asked what it was to be.

"I'm sick of this five-dollar rise," said he. "Let's make it a hundred dollars and have done with it. Here's Mr. Laidlaw going to sleep over it."

"Oh, don't you trouble about me," said Laidlaw, with a strange smile. "I'll play for anything you like if West will join in. It's the same thing in the end, anyway. What do you say, Murray?"

He appealed to the Rogue, his friend and cabin companion, who, with a shrug of his stooping shoulders, expressed his indifference.

"If you will put your money on the table, I'll play for what you please."

"That's rating us very low," said Marx, though the purpose of the request did not immediately occur to him. "I guess our money is as good as yours."

"We shall see when you show it to us," said the Rogue, quietly.

He took up the cards and shuffled them negligently. A few men gathered round the table and began to follow the game with interest. The sunlight shone down

through the open ports and focussed in a quivering beam upon the players; you could hear the chatter of women upon the promenade deck without, the swish of lazy seas and the iron pulse of the foaming propeller. It was five o'clock upon the afternoon of a glorious day of July. The steamer was two days out from Sandy Hook, and in four days more would be at Queenstown. There was not a human being aboard her who stopped to reflect how much might happen in four days.

The Rogue took up his cards, and play began in a desultory and unexciting manner. A couple of deals found Laidlaw winning ten pounds from Marx and half that sum from Sedgwick. The first Jack Pot was a matter of twenty pounds, which the Jew swept to his side carelessly and with something of contempt. He understood that West had challenged him, and if it came to a question of ready money, he believed the game to be already over.

"I make it fifty sovereigns to come in," he cried presently, putting the notes upon the table and looking West full in the face. Sedgwick, the obedient, pushed fifty pounds out upon the green cloth before him, and said, "That's mine." But the Rogue threw down his cards and did not play. The Lamb alone remained. He came in, of course. He would have staked his last shilling, anyhow, on a pair of aces. When the betting began, the Jew made it seventy-five pounds, and counted the money note by note. Sedgwick cried that it was a hundred, and the Lamb, losing courage suddenly, paid over his fifty and sipped his cocktail.

"A good game this," he remarked to someone near by. And then, observing that Murray West was dealing to him, he said, "My blind, I suppose? Well, I make it twenty pounds."

The Jew made it fifty again, and once more the Rogue threw down his cards. A *sotto voce* aside upon the part of Sedgwick that it was almost as amusing as playing pitch-farthing by yourself, did not draw any response from him. The Lamb lost his fifty pounds, and smiled childishly when he paid it. There was another Jack Pot when the deal passed to Marx, and this his friend Sedgwick pocketed. So far the two men had won over a hundred pounds from Herbert Laidlaw and a half of that sum from Murray West; but it was evident, none the less, that the Rogue perplexed them. They played like men who were expecting some subtle attack which would call upon all their resources, honest and otherwise, to meet it. When the blow fell, it had been some time anticipated.

The Rogue dealt and Marx made it one hundred pounds to come in. Sedgwick, acting as upon a good understanding, put his hundred pounds upon the table and waited for Murray West. The Lamb stood out for the first time, and the betting remained between the Rogue and the confederates.

"I make it two hundred and fifty pounds," said Marx, a little triumphantly.

"Three hundred," cried Sedgwick, "and there's my money."

They turned to the Rogue, who leaned back in his chair and smiled a little sardonically in spite of him-

self. His cards seemed to amuse him. He took a bundle of notes from the breast-pocket of his waistcoat and tossed them negligently upon the table.

"I play for that," he said quietly. "I think you'll find a thousand pounds there."

The mention of the sum, and a certain constrained silence following upon such a piece of daring drew a little group of spectators to the table. Marx, meanwhile, regarded the bundle of notes with an impudent stare, which concealed his own surprise and gave him time for thought.

"Well," he said at length, "I hope the Bank of England feels all right to-day."

"A little more comfortable than you do," retorted the Rogue pleasantly.

"Who says I'm uncomfortable? Do you think a thousand pounds will break me?"

"I'm waiting to hear."

"Well, you shan't wait long. See here, what's that now?"

"That," said Murray West, with conviction, "that is an exceedingly poor imitation of a note for a thousand francs."

"Do you say it's queer?"

"I do."

"Ah, you know a lot. Well, then, since you object to French money, we'll try again. Are these good enough for a tenderfoot Britisher?"

He produced honest notes to the tune of twelve hundred pounds, and laid them on the table.

"I make it that," he said.

"And I double it," cried West, in so odd a way that some of the spectators tittered.

As before, he took a roll of notes from his pocket and did not delay to count them. His eyes were fixed intently upon Sedgwick, who had been fumbling with the cards, but who now stopped with a look of blank dismay, which was shared by Marx. The plain truth was that the two men had little more than another hundred pounds between them. They must either "see" the Rogue, and put two thousand four hundred pounds upon the table, or pay the twelve hundred they had staked. The wealth of the man they opposed astounded them, for they would have wagered ten minutes ago that his whole fortune was not five hundred pounds.

"I didn't sit down to play skin the bear," said Marx angrily, while he counted the notes with his hand and threw his cards upon the table. "You can find someone else, and be darned to you! This isn't how gentlemen play. Their word is as good as their money. I don't pay, Sedgwick. Let him do what he pleases—I'm keeping my money!"

The Rogue pitched down his cards, and with a sudden swift movement he grasped the confederate Sedgwick's wrist and held it upon the table. The quickness of the attack and the surprise of it so far robbed the man of his self-possession that he half rose from his chair, and in so doing allowed the five cards which his knee had been pressing against the lower edge of the table to fall to the ground. At the same moment an apparatus for dealing cards deftly from

the pack fell from his sleeve and lay upon the green cloth for all the world to see. Herbert Laidlaw, utterly surprised, laughed like a boy when he beheld it. Some of the spectators nudged one another, but the Rogue had an ugly look upon his face.

"Why, yes," he said. "I've been wanting that all along."

He pocketed the implement, and taking advantage of Marx's gaping hesitation, he swept the bank-notes from the Jew's hand and began to fold them neatly.

"You see, gentlemen," he said to some of those round about him, "these men are what I thought them to be—not only professional card-sharpers, but also swindlers. They have won eight hundred pounds from my friend here since we left New York Harbour. I am about to return Mr. Laidlaw his money. The rest is my own, and I shall keep it."

He brushed back the lank, black hair from his forehead, and then counted out eight hundred pounds in bank-notes and handed them in a little bundle to his cabin companion. So far Marx had not uttered a single word, his silence being as much his incapacity for defence as his astonishment. The obvious hostility of his audience and the fact that they were upon a steamer where neither threats nor violence would help him, contributed to his reserve.

"As God's in Heaven, I'll make you pay for this—pound for pound, and something over!" he said, under his breath, and, without another word, he stalked from the smoking-room with Sedgwick upon his heels. A murmur of laughter followed him as he went, but



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SEDGWICK'S WRIST"**

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the prevailing note was one of surprise. Men asked each other what it meant that one sharper should be thus turning upon another. And why had the Rogue handed over eight hundred pounds of his plunder to his own I. O. U. lamb—the particular Southdown he had brought aboard with him to fleece. Was it to encourage the others—a mere bravado to win credit with the ship? Or might the more charitable assumption be entertained, and this man set before them in a new light? They did not know. The inscrutable face of the Rogue taught them nothing; he invited no man's confidence, was the same taciturn, stooping figure as heretofore when he quitted the saloon and went out upon the promenade deck. His absence set twenty tongues wagging, but none made anything of him. Anon it was reported that he had been seen by the wheel-house in close talk with Marx, the Jew, and this was new food for slander. After all, his generosity might have been nothing but a *coupe de théâtre* to drive off Marx and Co., and to keep the Lamb to himself.

Marx, indeed, had waited upon the lower deck until West came down, and having by this time recovered his natural self-assurance, he boldly accosted his antagonist and invited a conference.

"I want ten words with you—alone," he said, without any display of temper. "Let's go down to the wheel-house, and get out of the way of these women."

West followed him with a docility which seemed to promise much, but which was, in truth, nothing but the prompting of his curiosity. He knew that he had

not done with these men, but, for his own safety's sake, he was quite willing to hear what they had to say. The most part of the passengers had gone to their cabins by this time to make ready for dinner. The aft wheel-house cast a deep patch of shadow eastward upon the lower deck, and beyond lay that spuming wake of foam, which opened like a fan of cloven water whose blades might touch the infinite horizon.

"I guessed it would be this," said West shortly, when Marx halted and turned to speak. "You want your money back, I suppose? Well, my man, see here, you're not going to get a red cent of it. That's to begin with. I promised to teach you a lesson, and I've done it. Next time you meet one of my friends, leave him alone. I speak for your good."

Marx laid a hand upon the lapel of his coat, and would have remonstrated unctuously.

"It was different down at Jackson City when I took a hand with Abe Winshaw of Holt's," he remarked retrospectively. "Why, pard, I've seen Abe shear some lambs in his time, and precious clever he was about it; and now he's aboard a Red Star liner hustling his flock like a down-town Methodist. Say, did you know him in that same city, the Abe Winshaw I speak of?"

"You are perfectly aware that I know him. He taught one or two of you a lesson down there, I remember. You don't seem to have profited by it at all. Well, he's through—he's something else to do, Mr. Richard Marx, one time Robert Thorn."

Marx laughed at the mention of his many aliases.

"It's astonishing how the families get mixed up when one knocks about the world a bit. Here's you under a British flag and me under a German. Well, I guess the staff's the same, and that's the point. Look, now, Murray West, what's the meaning of yonder tenderfoot, and who's going to add up this particular nonsense? You've had twelve hundred pounds of my money——"

"Eight hundred of which you won from my friend last night and the night before——"

"I don't deny it. What's come to you that you quarrel with a man for winning eight hundred?"

"Did I not warn you?"

"Oh, be darned to that! I'm not his grandmother. If he wants to play an honest game——"

"Did you use the word 'honest'?"

"Come, now; we won't quarrel. You've guessed my pitch this trip and I'll be fifty out of pocket, anyway. Give him four hundred and I'll cry quits."

"He has already got it."

"I saw that, but you can change it. Four hundred and no scores between us."

"I've said that I won't give you a red cent. Did you ever know me change my mind?"

"You'll change it this time."

"Ah! strong language, then."

"Certainly. Do you know who is aboard this ship?"

"You are here for one, and another swindler by the name of Sedgwick."

"Leave him alone. Did you ever hear of Miss Jessie Golding?"

"It is possible."

"She's in stateroom twenty-three, going across to be married, now that the mourning for young Lionel Golding is off. Poor boy! He was shot in Jackson City, you remember."

"Well?"

"Why, nothing. When shall I have my lot?"

"Now," said West, with sudden heat; and he took the man by the neck and sent him with one kick headlong into the scuppers.

CHAPTER III

THE DUST OFF HER FEET

EARLY upon the morning of the following day the Rev. St. John Trew took a long cigar from his case and spoke of self-sacrifice.

"In three weeks' time," he said to Jessie Golding, "I shall be in my pulpit and you will be upon your honeymoon. Is it permitted me to say that I would willingly change places with you?"

"Of course you may. We say everything we want to in America, and that's why some people call us vulgar. I don't see why not, either. You always complain that the Church cannot draw the men. Now, we could do that—couldn't we?—and it wouldn't matter what we preached. Let's begin next Sunday. I'll hold forth on the foolish virgins, and you can put up your own banns. Isn't that it?"

The vicar purred audibly, as though the notion tickled him.

"A steamer is really an excellent home for nonsense," he said. "Perhaps that's why it does us all so much good. Just look around you and observe the pursuits to which intellect stoops when it is afloat. That excellent old fellow with the whiskers yonder, who is trying to throw potatoes into a tub, he is the

head of a great New York publishing firm. Imagine what the Century Club would say if they caught him at it in Fifth Avenue! Then look at our friend the lean curate, from Durham. He's putting as much ardour into a game of bull-board as would convert a generation of heathen. Next Sunday or the Sunday after he will be intoning 'When the wicked man,' as though nothing had happened."

"It's just that," said Jessie, philosophically; "nothing ever happens on a steamer. You get up because it's time to, and you go to bed because it isn't. Look at the sea. Who wants to do anything but watch it go leaping by? Oh, I love it! I love to think that those great rolling waves will go leaping by a thousand years from now. There's never any change about the sea, is there? You don't come back to it and say, 'How it's changed!' and 'Who's been building here?' and 'Where's the old place I loved?' No, it's always the same, and yet always changing. I suppose if one stood here for a million years the sea would not be different. You're quite sure of it, and it never disappoints you——"

"Unless," said the vicar, "it be in circumstances which are relatively unpoetical. I was not at table upon the first evening—the reflection reminds me of forgotten emotions—but a day like this should surely dispel them."

It certainly was an animated scene, and one typical of a Red Star boat. Few types of travellers were absent from that crowded deck, and in the scintillating web of colour, lords and commoners, age and youth,

the newest energies of America and the older manners of Britain, weaved their flippant picture of humanity. A cloudless day brought laughter in its train and shut the cabin doors upon consequences which had been far-reaching. The ocean swell rolled lazily, as though weary of stress and content to cry a truce with summer.

"It's just beautiful!" cried Jessie, in a burst of excited enthusiasm. "And, of course, because it's beautiful it won't last—or, if it did, we shouldn't think it beautiful any more. Why, suppose they came and told us that this was to go on for three months—the sun shining, the sea good, and nothing to do every day but to do nothing. Wouldn't your old friend the publisher hate the sight of potatoes then?"

She did not give him time to answer, but went on rapidly:

"He's a dear, though, and his wife's just like him. She asked me to read a book yesterday because she wanted my opinion. 'Tom values the opinion of young girls,' she said; 'they are the people who read novels.' I told her that I always borrowed mine, and she wasn't so happy. She didn't see that if no one ever borrowed books, the publishers wouldn't have any sale for them. Some people can't see things."

The vicar nibbled at his cigar and uttered a pious commonplace.

"People always try to borrow knowledge—and umbrellas," he said, with something of satisfaction at the thought. "Society views these offences with equa-

nimity. A man who borrows an open umbrella covers his blushes as he walks. Look at our friend the Rogue now——”

Jessie turned her head quickly, as though expecting to find the stooping figure of Murray West at her elbow.

“Why, where is he?” she asked.

“I was referring to him by way of an illustration. That man differentiates himself from the normal human race by walking, as it were, with the stolen umbrella neatly folded up. You can read the owner’s name upon the handle of it. And that reminds me. I believe there was something of a scene yesterday. The thieves fell out, though whether honest men came by their own I really cannot say.”

“Mr. Darnill, the theatre manager, says that young Laidlaw was paid four thousand dollars. I wonder what trick that was! Do you know, vicar, I dreamed of our Rogue all last night. I thought he followed me to England and would stop everywhere I stopped. If I spoke to him, he didn’t answer me. It makes my flesh creep to think of it. I know I’ll have to go and speak to him just now. I can’t help it—he fascinates me. If he said, ‘Jump overboard,’ I believe I’d do it. Those great black eyes of his——”

“Oh! they are black, then?”

“Of course they are. Haven’t you noticed it yourself?”

“Certainly not. There are some men it does not do to look full in the face. I should say you would be wise to interest yourself less in this somewhat dubious

personality. Mr. Bentham, I am sure, will tell you the same."

"The 'Bantam'—do you think so? He's talking to the Casino girls, isn't he? I thought he said that actresses were only to be tolerated when they married lords. He's quite a father confessor to them, isn't he?"

"Hem! I think you will admit that abstract terms when applied to young ladies are quite a mistake. I must say that I found Miss Lottie Causton most interesting; while her friend Dora—is not her friend named Dora?—well, she is quite a lively soul. She chaffed me about the shape of my hat—in a friendly way, of course. She has promised to come and hear me preach when we are all in London together."

"How improving! You should invite the Rogue also. It would be quite a family party."

The vicar shook his head in a disapproving manner.

"You are determined to reform the rascal. Well, don't forget that I warned you, for I see Mr. Bentham beckoning me. Some matter about to-night's concert, I suppose. It is astonishing the energy some people display in disturbing other people's amusement! Will you forgive me going down?"

"I'll read your book while you are gone. What is it? Something deep and cultured, now? Oh! 'The Crime in the Red House.' A course of sermons for Advent, I suppose?"

"They should suit your Rogue," the vicar said, and with that went hurriedly off to join the "Bantam,"

who conveyed him instantly to the saloon below, and there administered what the reverend gentleman called his morning glass of soda-water with just a suspicion of whiskey for medicinal reasons. Jessie, meanwhile, read precisely three pages of the profound book before her desire of human society—and especially of the society of man—proved too strong for her; then she jumped up upon an impulse and walked aft to the scene of those infantile pursuits which had moved her erstwhile to derision. The worthy New York publisher was still throwing potatoes into a bucket; his wife continued to peruse those manuscripts upon which she had desired a young girl's opinion; the Casino girls were being persuaded to admire a shoal of porpoises from secret places; the great theatrical manager had found his own steamer chair and slumbered peacefully in one extended rigid line to which a panama hat, cocked awry over the face, gave a dissolute diversity. In this quarter of the ship Jessie perceived the Rogue, and observed that he stood alone. Indeed, he was the one man who found occupation enough in that unchanging but ever-new aspect of the foaming wake which the *Jersey City* cleaved in the heavy waters. Westward, to the America he had left, his eyes were turned. The lank black hair blowing about his ears from a shooting-cap, the close-cut suit of dark flannel, the stooping attitude, were less to be observed than the animation of his eyes and the curious poise of an exceedingly intellectual head. Jessie said that at such a moment he looked quite like a boy, notwithstanding the thirty-five years which the ship's gossips gave him.

She had paused almost without knowing what she was doing when she approached the rail whereby he stood; and her desire to address this man, to take the liberty of a steamer's deck and make an acquaintance of him proved both delightful in its boldness and suggestive in its promise. What a stroke to have the Rogue's story from his own lips, if he would tell it to her! After all, she could come to no harm. And so, a thousand miles from the thought that a word, a look, might turn the whole course of her life and shape it anew, she stepped mischievously to the man's side and addressed to him a question.

"You can't see America, can you?" she asked a little wickedly.

He turned at the question and looked her through and through. It was impossible to avoid such a burning glance. Jessie knew that she was blushing.

"Why do you say that?" he exclaimed, with the readiness of one who admits nothing. "Don't we see farther with the mind than with the eyes? I can see America as clearly as I can see myself turning my back upon this ship."

He made a place for her by his side, as though convinced that she wished to continue; and so they stood together watching the spuming seas and the flying spindrift and the heaving waters which the ship cleaved and gathered up and flung past her, like some mistress insatiable of the deep. Jessie was never tired of this rolling panorama, and the mood in which she had been answered attuned itself to her own, and left her pensive.

"Why," she said, "what a queer thing to say! Children talk like that now. I remember when I was a child that I used to think myself somebody else, and say: 'There's Jessie watching you.' When the fire burned red I saw my own face in it, but we all do that, don't we?"

"I think so, unless we are very vain. A vain man never gets away from himself. When he walks his feet say, 'I—I—I—,' or perhaps, if he's self-made, it's 'Me—me—me.' His vanity gets between himself and the picture. He doesn't want to be on speaking terms with the Mr. Hyde we have all in us somewhere. If it isn't equal vanity to say so, I like to see the other side—myself in different moods. When I review the past, I act it in my mind. I was acting a scene when you came up to me——"

"Tell me about it. I'd like to know."

"I'll ask you a question first. Why would you like to know? That's fair, isn't it?"

"Why, yes; but what do you want me to say?"

"I want you to say what interest you can possibly have in a man whose touch is so repugnant to you that you gather up your skirts when he passes by?"

Jessie's face was crimson when she looked up to reply. Like many another flippant creature of her age, she had never thought it worth while to reflect that every overt act, be it of love or hate, must carry its own consequences at the appointed day.

"Oh," she said, trying to brazen it out, "you don't really mean it?"

"A touch of feminine art to please that creature

of dull intellect you call the vicar. Yes, it might have been that. His mind would bear the strain—it will help him to preach charity and long suffering, and to find the sheep. The clerical instinct, I have invariably observed, has a bias toward sheep. The soft, downy creatures suit them exactly. Hence the word ‘followers’—I presume you understand it in the English connection.”

“Of course I do. You are English, are you not?”

“I was ten years ago. I may be again. Once I said that I had shaken the dust off my feet and would never return. But the dust of the Fatherland clings. I don’t believe the man is yet born who has put love of country out of his heart. You Americans are to be forgiven much, just because, in spite of some intensity of expression and an excellent opinion of yourselves, you have a love for your own country which nothing can change or eradicate. I like you for that——”

“And for nothing else?”

“Oh, you have many good qualities—almost as many as your bad ones. Your hospitality is the truest and the most unselfish I have ever met. Your genius for finance is colossal. All your women are pretty—and a few are women. You pretend to despise your rivals, but you study every move of theirs, however trifling, and you are not ashamed to imitate them. Your young men are physically finer than the English, and now that they are learning manners there is hope for them. You are conscious of your immeasurable power and prone to boast of it. When you are in a temper, you have not the magnanimity of a great nation. You

do not wholly understand how to play, but you are learning—in short, time will make of you the greatest nation on earth if you will let it. Your danger is wealth and the social question. Most nations need to think only of the latter.”

He laughed at the trend of his own thoughts, and a certain levity of utterance betrayed his mock earnestness. Jessie had heard him with mingled feelings of resentment and wonder. The ship said that this man was a scoundrel. She did not think that he spoke like one.

“You’re laughing at America, and I won’t let anyone do that,” she cried, wishing to provoke him. “No Englishman really understands us, and that’s why you write books about us. I suppose when you go ashore you’ll be interviewed by newspaper men and take away our characters to show how grateful you are.”

“When I go ashore, I shall get as far away from newspaper men as I possibly can.”

“Then it isn’t true that——”

She flushed again, and broke off clumsily. Her uncontrollable tongue had been about to tell him what the ship was saying. He enjoyed her embarrassment, and delighted to play the *rôle* which scandal a-hungering assigned to him.

“I beg your pardon, it is all perfectly true,” he corrected. “I am a man with a past, and I generally carry it about with me. When I told you that I could see America, I meant to say that I could see something in my life which I would well forget—a friend’s farewell and his confidence in a man who did not deserve it.

We were rounding up cattle together at the moment you approached me; if you had delayed an instant we should have been in camp with the soup. I'm quite hungry at the thought; it's the sea air, I suppose."

"No; it's thinking about it. I can never read about eating and drinking without wanting to do it—that is, I mean, if the heroine eats a box of candy, I want a candy to nibble while I'm reading. It's foolish, but then everything's foolish——"

"Forgive me. Nothing is foolish but vulgarity and conceit. Those are the true fools who judge their fellow-men without knowing anything about them. I don't speak of woman, for truth is of small concern to her. I think at heart she would be very disappointed if her tittle-tattle proved true."

"Do you say that of American women?"

"Of all women."

"Then you are, I suppose, what they call a misogynist. I can't think why you are talking to me."

"I am trying to teach you how to see America though a thousand miles lie between you and your own country."

Jessie sighed a little pathetically.

"I love America," she said.

"And so you leave it——"

"All Americans do; but they return."

"If they must. I am speaking of your sex. You, for instance, will not return. You have sold your birthright for a castle and three generations of black-guardism."

"How dare you speak to me like that! Have I done anything——"

"Yes; you have asked me a question, and I have answered it. When you return to your friend—to that rhomboid in black who is styled facetiously a minister of the Gospel—you can tell him that every word of it is true. Here is the card-sharper, the sponge, the ne'er-do-well, who is not fit to touch your skirts. He makes no defence; he would not ask you for the world to think better of him. But he would teach you to see America—for you are in danger of forgetting it."

Jessie, accustomed to the homage of men, to their parrot-like repetitions, and their abject worship of her body and her father's fortune, felt as though someone had slapped her suddenly upon the cheek. She had plenty of self-possession, for such is America's dower to her daughters; but this brutal attack, the manner and the contempt of it, stung her pride to the quick, and with an angry stamp of defiance she turned away and went down to her own cabin.

The Rogue, meanwhile, continued to gaze over the waste of the waters as one who had caught up again the thread which an accident had broken. He lived, for the time being, as he had said, with that other self, the Murray West of the shadow years, the exile, the outcast in the land of aliens. Deeds he would have forgotten, days of shame, were returning to accuse him. The figures he would have buried grouped about him to claim his friendship by right of the masonic familiarity of need. Ghosts of despair rose up to defy his present and deny it. He turned from them

impatiently to pace the crowded deck, and, walking there, Richard Marx, the Jew, touched him upon the elbow.

"Are you going to pay me now?"

"Not a sixpence."

"Ah, I saw you with Jessie——"

"Indeed."

"Yes. I wonder if she knows how her brother Lionel died? I think not. Well, you'll be paying me to-night."

West made a sudden movement, and caught the Jew's fingers in his own.

"No," he said. And he wrung the man's hand as he spoke.

The Jew bellowed like a child. His fingers were black and blue when he looked at them.

CHAPTER IV

OF HONEYMOONS

THE ship recovered its spirits wonderfully as the voyage went on, and all sorts and conditions of men and women emerged from cabins which had cloaked their groans.

The morning deck, the vicar confessed, was like a Sunday "park parade." Dashing American girls in costumes which America had not made found, in the timid and modest language of the "Bantam," their sea feet and their sea tongues. They were here, there, and everywhere, like butterflies above a field of azure-blue. Staid old gentlemen, driven by well-fed doctors, shuffled their daily mile staidly before sitting down to a quiet rubber. Youths, who were never happy unless active, laughed so loudly over their games that the gulls drew close to hear the music. The inevitable bore, who must perish if he be not permitted to "get up" something, promoted divers harmless speculations, chiefly concerning the daily revolutions of ship's propeller. People paid their dollars gladly to be quit of him. He raced from chair to chair, his collar crumpled and the sweat upon his brow. Even the vicar, who was talking to Jessie very solemnly of marriage and its consequences, admitted that the eleemosynary instinct is out of place upon a ship.

"For heaven's sake, let us forget the nimble three-penny bit," he pleaded.

The bore regarded him with an eye askance.

"Well, well," said the vicar, when the man had done with him, "we were talking of honeymoons. A pleasant subject for such a sunny morning, though I have always observed that mankind avoids it after a certain age. It is not a subject that will bear reflection."

"Do you think so, vicar? Well, what about poor little me? I shall be off to Paris for my honeymoon just when you begin to preach again. Oh, it's lovely to think about it. I can see all the girls running in the shops to bring me hats—such hats, dreams in lace and feathers. We shall shop all day, and when there's nothing more to buy, then it's the Italian lakes. Tell me, vicar, do you think it's safe to take my husband to the Italian lakes?"

"You mean that, overcome by the attentions of the milliner's assistants aforesaid, he might take refuge in the water?"

"I didn't say it——"

"Hem! It is not necessary to be explicit."

"But why shouldn't I enjoy my honeymoon? Isn't it something out of the ordinary? I was tired of New York. My father buys me everything. He's bought me a husband now. Why shouldn't I be happy?"

"I devoutly trust that you will be. So far as human foresight can anticipate, your happiness is, indeed, provided for."

"Oh! you mean that lots of things might happen.

Why, yes; that's so. This ship might sink, or you might fall overboard."

"Heaven forbid. As to the ship sinking, I put my faith in Divine Providence. The captain tells me also that there are water-tight compartments."

"Then I wish you'd lock up that man in one of them. He's looking at me again—I know it; I can feel his eyes going up and down my back like a—yes, like a something you scratch horses with."

"A currycomb."

"That's it—a currycomb. He's just over there by the great cowl, isn't he? Has he got a camera, vicar? Don't tell me that he's got a camera!"

"Nothing of the kind. He is not even looking this way."

"That's unkind of him. But I'm glad he hasn't got a camera."

The vicar smiled.

"How did your pictures of him, those you took yesterday, come out?"

"The man in the dark-room says I must have snapped the fiend by mistake."

"More shade than light, then?"

"Yes, and yet—well, I oughtn't to say it, but don't you think it's a clever face?"

"The same has been said of Barabbas, who was a robber. In reality, you mean that you rather admire him?"

"Now, vicar, I won't hear it. Admire him? Why, no—I hate him. He's the first man I ever met who

insulted me to my face. If there wasn't another man in Europe I wouldn't speak to him again."

"Unless circumstances arose."

"What circumstances could arise? Do you want to make a hero of him? Oh! he's just horrid, and I won't hear another word about him."

The vicar laughed.

"He has moved away now. You can look up again."

"I suppose he's talking to those silly theatre girls?"

"He is talking to his friend the 'Bantam.' I shouldn't wonder if they were going down to the cabin to drink together. Dear me! How the time passes! It's eleven o'clock, and I have not yet had my morning glass of soda-water."

"Well, why don't you go and have it? People will think we're engaged if you sit by me like this. Say, we're not engaged, are we, vicar?"

"God bless me, no. I've a wife and five children in London."

He quitted his seat abruptly and descended the great staircase with the preoccupied air of a man who is contemplating a treatise upon the vices of his age. Left alone, Jessie turned impatiently to her Aunt Eva, the "last rose of summer," as the "Bantam" called her.

"Auntie," she said, "do you think daddy will meet us at Liverpool?"

"I'm quite sure he will, Jessie."

"So that if this man, this Mr. West, were to worry around, daddy would be there?"

"Whatever put that into your head? The man

never looks at you. What a foolish idea for a sensible girl like you, Jessie!"

"I'm not sensible, or I shouldn't want to marry Lord Eastry. A castle and three generations of something or other—that's what Mr. West calls it."

"My dear Jessie, be reasonable. You are attaining a great position."

"Just what the man said when he tried to fly. Oh, of course, I don't mean it, Aunt Eva, and I don't mean to speak to Mr. West again unless circumstances arise. I've told the vicar so."

"What circumstances could possibly arise? Don't we make our own circumstances? I have lived forty-one years, and no man that I disliked ever spoke to me. Certainly not—I wouldn't hear of circumstances!"

Jessie looked at her sharp-nosed aunt and admitted that her anxieties in this respect were altogether unnecessary. Eva was fifty-nine years of age. She had great tribulations of conscience sometimes as to the respective merits of thirty-nine or forty-one years for birthday books. Far from a fatalist, she believed in odd numbers and their attending virtues. "I wouldn't marry a man upon the thirteenth of the month if he were the last of his sex," she once said to Jessie. Jessie agreed that it would be wiser not.

"And," she said, with conviction, "I'm not going to spoil my trip because a man's always looking at me—so there! I've only a few days left to myself, and Gerald says I must come to years of discretion. I suppose I must if the coach is a yellow one with the family arms

upon it. Oh, dear, whatever did I do it for, Auntie? Why didn't he take you?"

The indignant old lady was too astounded at the suggestion to make any reply, and Jessie, fearing the argument, ran away to the music-room to strum wildly upon the piano there. Every note she played seemed to cry out to her, "Circumstances—circumstances." Defiantly she told herself that there could not possibly arise any circumstances which would justify her in addressing Murray West again. He had been arrogant, outspoken—even rude. She was not quite sure whether outspokenness in his case was anything but pure vanity. "He thinks I will go to him," she cried to herself passionately; "but I never, never, never will!" Vain boast. She was deep in talk with him at ten o'clock that night.

It befell by an accident, rare, but not unknown even upon a Red Star boat. Dinner was over in the saloon, the decks were brightly lighted, the ship's orchestra played at the head of the great staircase, when there came a rumour from the smoking-room that one of the ammonia tanks, situated just forward of the engine-room, had burst, and that the deadly fumes resulting were stifling the steerage passengers and some of the stokers' mess. For a little while no one paid much heed to the affair, but it was noticed that all the officers went forward, and presently those in the smoking-room who had been foremost in treating the matter as a jest ran out gasping and crying that everyone would be suffocated. Soon the stinging breath of the ammonia came aft as a blast from a chemical furnace;

and women who had been but an instant before passive spectators of an unwonted activity rose in dread alarm, magnifying the danger and terrified because there seemed no way of escape from it. The captain himself—a splendid Scotchman by the name of Ross—hearing of the panic, came aft to reassure the scattering groups and to ask for doctors.

“Keep your seats! Keep your seats!” he cried, in a tone which brought the men to their senses and the women to confidence. “The ammonia tank has burst, and you’re getting a breath of it. There’s no danger, ladies—none at all. Doctor Fletcher is with the poor people forward, and he’d be glad of any assistance if we have doctors aboard. The wind will put us straight again in ten minutes, please God.”

He hurried back again to direct the work, and when he had gone the coughing and crying and gasping were made lighter by the jests of brave women and the activity of ready men. Jessie, indeed, like a true child of America, could not resist her desire to see something of that which was actually passing upon the scene of action; and in spite of the burning air and the actual danger of collapse, she climbed to the upper deck and so looked down upon the fo’castle. And there she saw the Rogue, coming up from the stifling depths with a woman in his arms. Delaying merely to ascertain whether the rescued were alive or dead, he went headlong down the companion again, and presently emerged with a second and a third victim of the mishap. His activity and tempered courage earned the admiration even of the officers and crew. Men who

put their heads below the deck came up staggering and faint to declare that it was the mouth of hell. They protested the impossibility of any human being living down there for three minutes together; but Murray West brushed them aside while they talked and was first into the terrible pit, where the vapour choked the throat and the fumes were like acid in the lungs. They said next day that he had brought ten poor creatures to the deck, three of whom were dead; but he would hear no more on the subject, and was obviously ill at ease when the captain thanked him at the dinner table.

Jessie watched this scene from the security of the upper deck, where a cooler breeze of night freshened the atmosphere and beat off the heavy gases. It was not morbid curiosity alone which kept her there, for her nature was inherently sympathetic; and although, had she probed the truth, it might have told her that she was really fascinated by a man's bravery and resource, she could yet excuse herself upon a plea of frank utility and a desire to help those who suffered. While others were exclaiming fearfully or running away to their cabins and hiding themselves, or confessing that they could not look, Jessie went down quietly to her stateroom and obtained all the rugs and wraps upon which she could lay her hands. Armed thus she returned to the middle deck and began to offer her assistance. Some of the women had been snatched absolutely from their bunks; others were but lightly clad and shivering in the fresh night wind. Jessie wrapped them in such warm cloaks as she had, and sent

the idlers among the men running for others. Her awakened interest absorbed itself in a pleasure which was absolutely new to her. Here she was, a millionaire's pampered daughter, who, perhaps, had never stooped to one real act of womanly self-sacrifice in her life; here she was, regardless of her fifty-guinea gown, kneeling on a dirty deck, as active as any nurse from a hospital and more gentle than many of those worthy women. Now covering up a trembling girl, now putting brandy to the lips of a coal-grimed stoker, she was thinking all the time that this was a nobler phase of life than any she had known. Murray West, the Rogue, caught her in the act and encouraged her. She answered him without a thought of the validity of those particular circumstances.

"I should get her to a cabin," he said, when she had covered up a fragile-looking woman who sat apart trembling, but without complaint. "It will be all right downstairs just now, but they must blow the fumes out first. The captain says he will have bunks made up in the second class."

"She can come to my stateroom," replied Jessie, without raising her head. "My uncle's cabin is not occupied. He could not come with us. I'll take her there right now. What are we going to do for the poor stokers?"

"They are going to dose them with a little cold water and some whiskey afterwards. Don't worry about the men. Whiskey's the specific. They'll be swearing about it in ten minutes' time."

He offered his arm to the poor woman and led her

away to the vacant stateroom. The work of rescue had been completed by this time, and it was known throughout the ship that the accident had cost the lives of two of the crew and three of the passengers. Men who had done nothing flocked together in the smoking-room and talked about it. Waiters were carrying cocktails and longer "quenchers" even after the dawn had broken upon a sleepy sea; while upon the promenade deck timid women, afraid of their cabins, moved like spectres in the morning mists. Jessie was one of these, though it was not fear which kept her from her bed. The scene still troubled and excited her imagination; the daylight did not wholly banish that vignette wherein the lanterns had flashed their light upon the faces of the living and the dead. She admitted to herself that she was glad when Murray West came up to her. He had lent his heavy overcoat to a stoker, but he did not seem to feel the bitter wind.

"Well," he asked, crossing the deck to her side directly he perceived her, "and how's the patient?"

"She's sleeping," said Jessie. "She only woke up once, and that was to ask for her sewing-machine."

"The habit of her slavery. She is thinking of her daily bread. Observe the beauty of modern civilisation. These people die with sewing-machines in their hands. It was a cross once, but that was a long time ago."

"I shall do something for her in England," said Jessie decidedly.

"You are doing something to-night—giving her your sleep, it appears."

"No, I won't claim that. I couldn't sleep. I saw the thing all over again—the woman who died in your arms. I want to tell you that I thought it very brave of you——"

"Nonsense! You want me to tell you that you acted well. Isn't that it? You didn't lose your head, and now you feel very proud of it."

Jessie stamped her foot with indignation.

"You are the rudest man I ever met in all my life."

"Then you should be glad to have sailed in this ship. Experience is useful. Think how many times, when you are at a loss over the dinner-table, you can begin with the 'rudest man.' He was a card-sharper on the *Jersey City*, you will say. You lifted your skirts to let him pass while orthodoxy in a muffler and a shawl guffawed. Which reminds me—Israel kept to its tents, I see. Your parson snored right through. Ah, what a type for the blessed apocalypse."

"You know nothing of Mr. Trew, and are unjust to him. Men don't believe anything nowadays, and so they talk about the ministers."

And then she added upon an impulse of temper:

"I'm sure he's a better man than you are."

"The very reason for which I quarrel with him. Here's a brand for the burning all ready to his hand, and what does he do? Snatch it out? Not a bit of it.

He goes downstairs for his morning glass of soda-water and leaves you to stir the fire. Do you think

a man of that kind ever saved a human soul? I don't."

"You are very gloomy to-night."

"Oh, I leave the gaiety to you. If women did not laugh, death would be intolerable. It's because you're shallow that you throw off these impressions so quickly. No woman grieves long, except for a lover or children. They've little heart outside their own affinities."

Jessie was quite silent. She turned from him, but not so quickly that the tear upon her cheek was hidden.

"Why do you say that?" she asked, in a choking voice.

"Because I am a fool. Yes; I was forgotten by a woman once, and I have never forgiven or forgotten in my turn. Come, you have a sorrow. I spoke like a brute. Try to think that I am not really unsympathetic."

"I am sure of it," said Jessie, who would not have believed it possible that a voice so hard and cold could melt in a moment and become gentle and winning as that of a child. "It's so easy to wound, and so difficult to heal. Oh, yes, you didn't stop to think. Men are just like that. If they can say a clever thing, they don't care who suffers."

"I deserve to be scolded. Won't you tell me of your sorrow, Miss Golding?"

He had never addressed her by her name before. This new manner was difficult to resist. Jessie had just determined that she would tell him nothing of her

own story when she discovered herself telling him everything. True sympathy is as wine to the tongue. Jessie delighted in the recital.

"Excepting my father, who is dearer to me than anything in the world, I never loved but one man in my life," she said; "that was my brother Lionel. I don't think I really understood what death meant before Lionel died. Oh, it was like the end of my world. Everything was changed; there wasn't a pleasure I had which I could enjoy again. If I walked in the street I used to remember how he walked with me, and say, 'Never more!' The littlest thing could bring back to me some word or thought of his. I loved him so! We weren't rich then, and Lionel was away in Jackson City. He died there. I remember the time so well. They came to tell us in the night. I heard my father's voice, and I ran down to him. One doesn't believe or understand it all at first. I think weeks passed before I knew that it was all the truth, and that I should never see my brother again. Sometimes, even now when I am at home, I wake in the middle of the night and fancy that Lionel is sleeping in his own room. I'm sure he is near me often. We may believe that of the dead, may we not?"

"I am convinced that we may. There are very few, I am sure, who do not, even if it be but once in a lifetime, hear some voice from the unseen world. The sure knowledge that we do is the greatest argument for immortality with which I am acquainted. Believe that your brother Lionel is very near you in sorrow and in joy. It is no miracle which makes our love

eternal—for love is nature, and nature forbids it to perish.”

They both fell to a silence of reverie, and so watched the great gold sun leap up above the swell and spread its arc in yellow splendour. The long waves caught up their colour, and were deeply green in that spreading arc of light. Shadows upon the ship became men and women, afraid no longer, but welcoming the day.

“Your brother died in Jackson City?” Murray continued anon. “Are you altogether acquainted with the circumstances of his death?”

Jessie looked up with flashing eyes.

“He was killed in a quarrel,” she said. “My father has spent thousands of pounds trying to find the man who shot him. Oh, if we only knew! If we only knew the name! To think that he goes unpunished while my brother is dead! But it will not be always. I am sure that we shall know some day.”

“And that man will never obtain your forgiveness?”

Her blue eyes faced him without flinching.

“If I knew the man,” she said, “I would never sleep again until he had been punished. I could kill him myself! Don’t stare at me so! You don’t know what I have suffered! You can’t know!”

She buried her face in her hands. Murray watched her for a little while, as though hesitating, and then, without another word, he left her to her grief.

CHAPTER V

THE RING AND THE MAN

TWO conversations, momentous to the stories of two passengers upon the steamer *Jersey City* are hereafter recorded: (a) as the pedagogues say, the conversation between Murray West and his friend, Herbert Laidlaw, in their "inside" cabin upon the main deck; and (b) the brief interview between one Richard Marx and Jessie Golding, a stranger to him, at the moment when a steward jangled his bell for lunch. Let us take them in that order, and hear Murray West to begin with.

He had slept but a couple of hours since he left Jessie upon the deck, and a little irritable for want of sleep, he returned to his cabin after breakfast and began to search it thoroughly for some object which he missed. Considerate usually for the feelings of others, he showed little consideration upon this particular morning, but rooted here and rooted there, until his companion, the Lamb, started angrily from his pillow and asked him what the devil he was making such a noise about. Murray answered him with a word which sent Laidlaw's head down upon the sheet again and brought an exclamation to his lips.

"I've lost the ring, Herbert."

"The ring? What ring?"

"His ring. You don't want me to name him."

"Am I never to hear anything but his name?"

"You are reaping, Herbert; but I must find the ring."

"Oh, hell! let me sleep."

He turned his face to the wall and drew the clothes over his head. Murray continued the search with a woman's diligence; he was not at all surprised when Laidlaw sat up again and asked him another question.

"What time is it?"

"Look at your watch."

"It's stopped. Say, my head's like a top. Won't you send me a brandy and soda in?"

"Not a spoonful. Get up and breathe. Try the fresh-air cure. Really, you are a dreadful child, Herbert."

"Perhaps so; perhaps not. We'll see in England. Have you got it, then—the ring, I mean?"

"No. I must have dropped it when the tank burst. Don't you see it's awkward? I can't advertise it."

"You mean that she'd get to know. Well, let her. Who cares?"

Murray sat on his bunk and looked forward into space vacantly, as a man who dreams.

"I care," he said quietly.

"What, for a little Boston doll? No, not you, Murray. You're too clever."

"Men are never clever in their relations with women. The lesson dates from Adam, Herbert."

"Oh, hang! Adam wasn't stone-broke! He wasn't divorced."

"You are thinking of this man, Eastry."

"Of course I am."

"She'll never marry him, Herbert."

"Who says so?"

"I say so."

"Great Scott—no! And what's to become of me?"

"Oh, you'll find your land legs by that time. A man can't go on always as you are going on. I think England will do you good. I hope it will give you something to live for—self-respect, honour, self-command. Don't you see, Herbert, how very different your life might be?"

"Ha! you say so, old black gown?"

"But it is so."

"When you are with me——"

"A nurse is necessary when a man is sick. When he is well he goes out into the sunlight; the very sight of her apron-strings is hateful to him. You'll work well enough without me in England."

"Perhaps; if the Devil lets me get so far. But, say, are you serious about Jessie Golding?"

"Do I look like a love-lorn fool?"

"Not quite; but looks don't count when a man's that way. Suppose she gets to hear about Lionel?"

"I shall tell her myself at the proper time."

"Not about me? Good God! Murray, you wouldn't do that?"

"Oh, of course. Tell her the whole story, so that we may both find ourselves in a police-court. Yes, I'm the very man to do that."

"I know you're not; but she may hear all the same. You won't advertise this ring now; you wouldn't take such a risk."

"I shall put a notice on the board, and say that it may be returned to the purser. No one will know then, and you may imagine that I shan't wear it again on the ship."

"That's right. It isn't safe. And, say, can't I have just a thimbleful?"

"Yes. Where's the water-bottle? I should drink about a pint if I were you."

He continued the search as though the ring were precious and of great concern to him. He would not have lost it, he told himself, for a hundred pounds.

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The "Bantam," standing for the pedagogues (b) read the brief paper upon the public notice board, and went from group to group about the deck asking everyone if he or she had found a finger ring. When he came to the Rev. St. John Trew and to Jessie at the purser's side, he consented to take a chair and to speak of it.

"Somebody's lost a ring," he said. "I don't exactly know, but I think it must be our friend the Rogue."

"In which case it was probably stolen," said the vicar cheerfully.

"Oh!" said Jessie. "And that's cheering. What sort of ring is it, Mr. Bentham—a lady's?"

"He preserves a secrecy which is open to suspicion.

I should not be surprised to hear that hearts were crossed in pearls and turquoises."

"You don't know anything about it," cried Jessie savagely. "I don't believe it's his ring at all."

"No more do I, though it's in his hand-writing—I mean the notice on the board."

"A mean, cramped, hang-dog fist, I'll wager," put in the vicar.

"There was nothing mean, cramped, or hang-dog about what he did last night," persisted Jessie, angry in defence. "He was saving lives while you were snoring in your beds."

The vicar coughed lightly and changed the subject.

"I hope I don't snore," he said unctuously. "Indeed, my dreams would be greatly disturbed if I thought so. We must really have a collection for these poor people, Miss Golding. The voyage threatens to prove quite an unlucky one. I should most humbly suggest that I address our fellow-passengers in the saloon, and that the offertory be collected afterwards. We must do what we can—our religion teaches us that."

"I suppose you will head the list with a hundred pounds?" exclaimed the "Bantam," who had lofty views when other people's subscriptions were concerned. The vicar almost rose from his chair in alarm.

"A hundred pounds! God bless me, I don't think I have a hundred pounds in the world, Mr. Bentham. No, no; it is not for the Church to give—that is the

cherished privilege of the laity. Each in his own sphere—the priest in the pulpit and the churchwarden in the aisle. I should say that the list be first offered to others. Who am I to head it?”

“I’ll give five hundred dollars,” said Jessie to relieve his embarrassment. “You can pay it for me, Mr. Bentham. I’ve got a purse, I know; but it’s somewhere between my shoes and the middle of my back. When are you going to begin, vicar? I’m sure you talk beautifully. Don’t you remember you said so when you called yourself a rogue?”

The vicar beamed upon her.

“You must prepare a little platform for me,” he said. “I don’t suppose we can get any flowers, but these from the dinner-tables will do. We might have singing afterwards, and then a little collection. I suppose it will be wise to get the captain’s consent. Tell him, please, that I do not wish to push myself forward in any way, but if any word of mine——”

“Can catch the nimble dollar. There! Isn’t that vulgar, vicar? Aunt Eva says I must not say ‘nimble dollar’ when we get to Monkton Castle. Do you think it is very bad?”

“It is not Shakespearian, certainly.”

“And is my *fiancé* Shakespearian?”

“Hum! I should say that he is rather a disciple of Rabelais; but, of course, the literary tastes of our aristocracy are not always easy to understand.”

“Especially when they read the—— What is it—that pink paper with all the funny little stories in it, you know? What do they call it?”

"God bless me!" said the vicar, betrayed beyond repair. "She means the *Pink 'Un*."

The "Bantam" laughed immoderately and with an indelicacy which did not help a good man in his dilemma. It was about the hour for the morning glass of soda-water, and the two men made their excuses presently and went down, as the vicar said, to see the possibilities in the way of a platform and flowers. Jessie told him once that the second word he ever spoke as a baby was "one word more," and certainly few remembered the occasion when an economy of words had troubled him. Even before the temptation of the soda-water, he must hark back to the missing ring.

"Be sure and find out who has had a ring stolen," he said gaily, as he buttoned his coat for the important business in hand. "We shall write a new *Gabotiau* together, you and I, before we have done, Miss Golding."

"And put your portrait on the cover just to let them know what dreadful things are inside," cried Jessie spitefully.

Her bouts with the parson invariably ended in her victory, and perhaps because of her triumphs over him, he returned to her side again and again. Few of the others upon the ship did not tire her. More than once she had left that "old dear" the publisher at the most exciting moment of a dissertation upon the latest German philosopher. The one lord whom they had shipped to their honour passed happy days exchanging masterpieces of wit with the Casino company.

Jessie added new words to her dictionary while she listened to his lordship's classic tongue, and some of these puzzled her greatly.

"What is a 'blighter'?" she asked the "Bantam" one day.

He answered vaguely that a "blighter" is a man who blights.

"Then I suppose you would call the vicar that?"

"Heaven forbid! It is a term of endearment common to golfers and other frivolous persons."

"Are those card-players 'blighters'?"

"Whom do you mean—the Rogue?"

"No; the others. The man out of the wilderness—Richard Marx."

"I have not carefully considered the point. Are you interested in his abilities?"

"I? Why, no. As if I could be! He is interested in mine, though. Wherever I go I find him waiting for me. Do you think he wants me to play cards?"

"An older game, Miss Golding. I'll ask him his intentions if you like."

"Tell him to go away back and sit down. I'm sure he thinks I belong to him."

"Manna in the desert. He must certainly think you fell out of Heaven."

"Perhaps I did, and that's why they won't let me stop in America."

The "Bantam" turned a phrase nicely, and henceforth paid more attention to the Jew than he had been doing. It was quite evident, as Jessie said, that

Richard Marx watched her closely wherever she went ; indeed, he shadowed her assiduously, and more than once made some effort to speak to her. His courage, however, appeared to desert him at the necessary moment ; and it was not until the day when the notice about the missing ring added to the curiosities of the board upon the staircase that he took advantage of the vicar's temporary absence from Jessie's side and actually dared to introduce himself. She had observed him hovering about her for some time, but now, of a sudden, when the men had gone below, he crossed the deck with short, shuffling strides, and bent toward the girl until his black beard almost touched her pretty hat.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he began. "Do you say that someone has lost a ring?"

"Oh," cried Jessie, startled ; "but I really don't know anything about it. Why do you ask me?"

"I thought I heard—you won't mind me, will you?—well, I thought I heard that gentleman with the red necktie—not the clergyman, but the other—I thought I heard him say someone had lost a ring. You'll think it a liberty, I suppose ; but there it is. I've found a ring, and he's lost one, and two and two make one, you see."

Jessie regarded him with open-eyed astonishment. She was not in the habit of disguising either her affinities or her aversions, and this man was repulsive to her.

"Why don't you ask Mr. Bentham right now?" she exclaimed.

The Jew stooped yet more, and showed her something bright in the hollow of his hand.

"Because—you won't think it a liberty, will you?—well, this ring that was lost, I believe you have seen it before."

He flashed it before her, and then let it fall into the lap of her dress. It was not a pretentious ring; nothing, in fact, but a broad band of gold set with a single turquoise. Jessie knew the ring so well. Her eyes were dim when she looked at it.

"Yes," she said slowly. "I have seen that ring before, Mr. Marx."

"And you know the owner of it, then—you know him?"

"If I did——"

She stopped abruptly. Her cheeks flushed crimson. Now, for the first time, she knew the meaning of that message.

"Do you mean——" she asked.

"That the man who shot your brother is on board this ship. Yes; I mean that, Miss Golding."

He did not wait for her answer, but slouched away as he had come.

The vicar of Sackville Street appeared suddenly at the stair's head, and espying Jessie where he had left her, hastened to his seat with a joyous exclamation.

"Ha!" he cried; "my good angel lingers, then."

Jessie rose from her chair and walked away without uttering a single word. The vicar stared after her in wounded astonishment.

"America has no respect for age or sex," he said dolefully.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACCIDENT

THERE were very few of the *Jersey City's* passengers upon her decks when the accident befell her—for it chanced that the vicar of Sackville Street was then delivering an impassioned oration in the saloon, and many hung upon the words of so worthy a man. Give him his due, the Rev. St. John Trew knew how to appeal to an audience such as this. Jessie declared that, if it had not been for the stewards carrying glasses, she might have believed herself in some fashionable city church. The great gilded dome of the saloon, the organ in the gallery, the upturned faces, the soft lights; above all, the preacher's saintly face and his mellow periods, contributed to the impressions of a striking scene. And this was to say nothing of the flowers upon the platform. The vicar certainly knew the precise tints which suited his pasty complexion. "I don't go well with geraniums," he had said. Jessie quite agreed with him.

His oration, we bear witness, was as eloquent as it was pathetic. He began in a pleasant, even jocular vein. It was not good for man, he said, to bestir himself after dinner. The greatest minds gave up that pleasant hour to the club, the theatre, the home life,

perhaps even to certain reflections upon the cook and the *menu*. He asked them to do none of these things. The dinner had been excellent. ("Hear, hear," from the "Bantam.") There would be many charming ladies ready to entertain them before the lights were out (applause from the lord of the Casino girls), but, in the meantime, he would urge his claim upon their attention and their sympathy. Changing his tone by an effective modulation, the vicar reminded them that in the midst of life we are in death. Men and women had died yesterday under circumstances which must bring home to them the reality and the inevitableness of the eternal truths. What claim had they to the mercy which had been shown to them? Why were those taken, and these left? Was it not that they might minister to the necessities of the weak and the helpless, unloose the purse-strings of their hearts, and take upon them those worldly burdens? The vicar convinced himself that it was.

"We, in our pleasures," he went on, "stand shoulder to shoulder with the awful mystery, but are unconscious of his presence and heedless of his warnings. Reflect but a moment, my friends," he said, "how Divine Providence is watching over us even while I speak to you. I do not know how many thousands of miles we stand from the nearest land, but I do know that the great lonely sea is all about us, that its waters wash the faces of the unnumbered dead who have been its toll since the world began; and I ask what goodness of our Master keeps us from that? Why are we spared? How and for what does the light of the

Divine Countenance still shine upon us? But one plank," said the vicar, pointing dramatically to the floor beneath him, "but one plank between eternity and you who hear me. Is not that a dreadful thought? Are we wise to put it from us?"

He paused, catching an observation from the chief engineer, who took the opportunity to remark that the ship was double-bottomed and of good Sheffield steel; but the officer was called to the engine-room before the speaker could remonstrate, and heaving a sigh of relief the vicar nerved himself for a final impassioned appeal. He was in the very throes of a touching harangue, when everyone became aware that the throb of the great pistons had ceased for the first time since the *Jersey City* steamed from New York Harbour. If this occurrence occasioned no alarm, it at least excited curiosity, and sent many shamelessly to the decks above. Sovereigns and bank-notes, it is true, were tossed into the silver salad-bowl which the chief steward had thoughtfully displayed on the crimson cloth before the platform; but few waited for the development of the "plank" motet; and even the Rev. St. John himself turned a little pale and began to hesitate for words. His flock had become plainly demoralised, and he himself was in no better case. The desire to know sent all thoughts to the decks above, and there the vicar betook himself ultimately with no little pleasure.

"What is it, Bentham? What has happened?" he asked that well-groomed little man, directly he had breath to speak. The "Bantam," grown important

upon the occasion, addressed his answer to quite a numerous audience.

"Oh, it's just nothing—nothing at all. Don't you be alarmed, ladies; you take your cue from me. The what-do-you-call-it has broken, and the engineers are putting in another. We'll be running again in an hour, won't we, engineer?"

A young engineer, black and grimy, and carrying a spanner in his hand, laughed very rudely when the "Bantam" spoke.

"That's so," he said. "We've broken the propeller shaft, and the chief's getting a new one out of his waistcoat pocket. It's all right, ladies."

"There, I told you so," said the "Bantam." "Just a ten-minutes' job. I say, girls, suppose we get up a dance. There's nothing like it if you don't want to bother—is there, Miss James?"

The Casino girl thus addressed declared that she doted upon waltzing; while the little man, for his part, hurried from group to group, reassuring everyone, and leaving laughter behind him. Meanwhile, the vicar, not a little nervous and very desirous of company, asked many for news of Jessie, and went wandering about the deck until he found her at last in the shadow of the wheel-house, and was not a little chagrined to discover that her companion was the Rogue.

"Come," he cried, a little reproachfully, "weren't you at my meeting, then?"

"How can you be so ungrateful? Why, I was the first to cry, vicar."

"Dear me, dear me. Of course, I remember now. You sat under the organ with Mr. Bentham. I thought there was a good deal of noise in that quarter of the room."

"Oh, yes; we were moved, you know. Some of the men had to send for cocktails to prevent breaking down altogether. Oh, why, vicar, why do men want such a lot of keeping up? Is it because they are the stronger sex?"

Murray West ventured to join in, unasked.

"It's not their fault," he said. "The first woman asked them to have something, and they've been on the lookout for it ever since."

The vicar coughed his displeasure and turned designedly to Jessie.

"I believe," he said, with the tone and authority of an expert, "that we have broken our propeller shaft. So far as I understand the circumstances, we must drift at the mercy of wind and tide; it may be for some hours. The situation is undoubtedly very dangerous."

"Just as dangerous as a game of croquet in the dark," cried Murray, with a little laugh. And then he said, "I hope you've made your will, vicar."

"God bless me! do you really think there's any necessity for such an extreme measure? But you are only joking, surely."

Murray leaned over the rail and watched the rolling swells. Weird rays of light from open portholes caught the foam caps and sprayed them with changing jewels as of aqua-marine and the froth of emer-

alds. In the hollows of the waves the water was intensely dark and green and surging, and the helpless steamer sagged to the Atlantic swell like some mighty log swept suddenly beyond human control. Upon the deck itself men and women stood in little groups to discuss the trouble and laugh at it. An aureole of light from the great staircase showed the white shawls nestling about white necks, and the ashen faces of those who stood in the glare of quivering beams. A girl's voice rang high and shrill in an interval of seas; the captain paced the bridge with the impatient step of one who suffers anxieties.

Murray West continued to watch the ebb and flow of the swell for some minutes before he answered the parson. His thoughts seemed to have passed from the ship to the far horizon which the moon's beams discovered. When he spoke he raised himself to his full height with a nervous gesture habitual to him.

"Joking? Oh, yes; it's quite a matter for joking. Listen to those hammers, vicar. They are wielded by the men who regard a broken shaft as the best fun possible. If you'll step along they'll be glad for you to read *Punch* to them. I don't suppose we can drift about here for more than three days without running into something. Humorous, isn't it?"

The vicar's face blanched, though the dim light befriended him.

"Do you seriously say that this is an accident which cannot be repaired?"

"They'll tell you when they locate the mischief. What can be done at sea will be done by these Red Star

engineers, for a handier lot don't sail. They mended the shaft of the *Manhattan*, you remember, and brought her only five days later into Queenstown after just such a mess as this. It all depends where the shaft has broken. If the chief guesses rightly, the propeller itself has gone overboard. You'll have to sail with two engines next time, vicar, if you wish to keep farther away from Paradise than you are to-night."

The Rev. St. John did not understand three words of it; but the unorthodox account of their position alarmed him still further.

"Have we no sails, then?" he asked.

Murray shook his head and pointed to the stumpy masts of the *Jersey City*.

"What sails can you bend to those? Your pocket-handkerchief and my pyjamas perhaps. Don't talk about sails if you wish to see London inside a month. Red Star boats aren't built for sails; they're built for show passages and hustling millionaires. Shall I put you in the latter category, vicar?"

"God bless me, what a man it is! You don't tell me, sir, that we shall drift about here until some passing ship comes to our help?"

"I do tell you that identical fact. If the engineers are unable to repair the shaft, we are as helpless as an empty barrel in a duck-pond. The sister ship *Hudson River* passed us yesterday. We may go a day, and we may go five before help is found. I'm sorry for your flock if it is waiting for you, vicar."

"My flock is in no hurry. It is the ladies I am

thinking of. Consider the case of Miss Golding here; she is about to be married on her arrival in London. We must all feel very sorry for her."

Jessie, who had been standing a few paces apart, heard her own name instantly and came nearer.

"Why are you sorry for me, Mr. Trew?"

"You must ask Lord Eastry, Miss Golding."

"Oh, that. Yes; it's tragic, isn't it, not to be present at one's own wedding? Well, I suppose they'll call it American. But I can't swim there, can I, vicar?"

The vicar shuddered at the notion.

"We will hope for the best," he said suavely. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder, you know."

"Please spare me. It's really very dreadful."

"Nothing less than a calamity," said West. "I will tell the chief, and he'll work miracles. Here they are, coming to see what is the matter with the propeller. I suppose they will clear us all out. Passengers are dreadfully in the way when there is any trouble on a ship. Let us help them by taking ourselves off. We could see everything from the upper deck, Miss Golding."

Jessie assented willingly, and preceded Murray up the ladder to the high deck beneath the bridge. The vicar, meanwhile, put himself, as he said, into the hands of Providence and the smoking-room steward, who brought him a brandy-and-soda, and regaled him with horrible tales of stranded ships upon which the chaplains had first been eaten by hungry and exasperated crews.

The scene upon the promenade deck became more animated every moment, and when a number of engineers trooped aft to the poop, and there fitted up a powerful electric searchlight, the drama of the night and its possible significance appalled the timid with a new suggestion. The surging water about the steamer now glowed with a radiating silver iridescence beautiful to see. Patches of light and shadow revealed or hid the anxious faces of the tireless engineers. Women half masked by lace wraps and waterproofs watched the work, and in their hearts prayed for its success; and everywhere upon the steamer, even among the hardest of the crew, an air of busy alertness forbade questions or dictated impatient answers. All would be well in an hour or so, the seamen said. None knew or would so much as think that the *Jersey City* was making her last voyage, and that before three days had passed she would be at the bottom of that ocean she had crossed so often and defied so valiantly.

"It's a splendid night," said Murray, when he had followed Jessie to the upper deck and found her a seat whence she could watch the scene as upon the stage of a theatre below. "This ability to do something material always appeals to me, perhaps because I am so helpless myself. Civilisation makes us very dependent upon others. Adam, if you think of it, must have been quite a Robinson Crusoe in his way. He couldn't call a gardener in to tie up his French beans, and he certainly was not troubled by a plumber's bill. Look at those fellows down there—

what fine specimens! And every man could make you something out of a bar of steel which I couldn't make if my life depended upon it. You especially ought to think well of them, Miss Golding. Their skill is turning your tragedy into an excellent comedy. They understand, perhaps, the importance of a woman being in time for her own wedding."

"Why do you call me a woman, Mr. West? Do I look so very old?"

"A general term. I regard you as already married."

"Thank you. And this is your wedding call?"

"Oh, no. I haven't the slightest desire to come to your house. When a woman—shall we continue to say a woman?—gathers up her skirts while a man goes by, she certainly does not wish to see him at her *soirées musicales*. I shall keep as far away from you as I can."

"That's polite of you—oh, just so polite! And do you really think I did gather up my skirts?"

"Charmingly; I haven't seen anything prettier for a long time. It reminded me of a picture in last year's Salon—'Mademoiselle Dédaigneuse.' I wish you would go on with it."

"Tell me, how did you see last year's Salon?"

"In a dollar picture-book in Jackson City."

"Jackson City? Why, you know Jackson City, then?"

"I lived there three years."

"Then you must have met my brother Lionel?"

Her face had grown serious at the question, and for

the first time since he had been acquainted with her he could not meet her steadfast gaze.

"Yes," he said very slowly; "I knew your brother Lionel."

Jessie did not pursue the instant advantage which this response gave her.

"I want to tell you something," she said. "I'm sure it's right to tell you. I've been dreadfully troubled all day. I must speak to someone about it. Please look at this ring. I think you have seen it before. It was my brother's ring. Mr. Marx, your friend, brought it to me this morning. He did not say that you lost it, but Mr. Bentham thinks you did. Will you please tell me the whole truth? We shall never understand each other until you do."

She had been fumbling in the bosom of her dress while she spoke, and having discovered what she wanted there, she put the ring which he had lost yesterday into his hand and waited for his answer. His unusual perturbation in some way spoke for him already, but he made one last effort to avoid candour, and was not at all surprised at his failure.

"Miss Golding," he said, "will you trust me if I ask you to do so?"

"I am trusting you right now."

"That ring is mine. It was given to me by your brother Lionel just before he died. I was with him to the end. If he had lived, I think he would have told you that I was his friend. I can say no more. I have no right to say more, and it is only to you, his sister, that I would say as much. If you do not wish our

ways to part, please let us leave it there. It is a very sad story, and I would have both of us forget it if we can. Sometimes, I think, our only duty to the dead is to forget everything but our love for them. I shall never part with your brother's ring, but I have already forgotten the day which gave it to me. I would have you help me to do that."

Jessie listened with grave astonishment.

"Why should I not speak of my brother?" she exclaimed at last. "Oh, I am sure that Lionel never did anything of which I should be ashamed. Why do you insinuate that he did?"

"I insinuate nothing; I am merely anticipating your questions. An unlucky chance and a scoundrel have put me at this disadvantage. I cannot help it. I must hold my tongue."

"You should have done that to begin with. If you were the only man with Lionel when he died, you know how he died. My father and I have a right to hear that. We have a right to hear the name of his murderer."

"He was not murdered, believe me."

"It is for you to prove it to us."

"I fail to see any obligation."

Jessie uttered a low cry.

"You know the name of the man, and yet you keep it from us."

"I shall always keep it from you."

"Then it is your own name—you, you! I shouldn't have been so blind. It was you! Deny it if you can."

"I do deny it. It was not I. Your suspicion is

worthy of a woman. I think we might leave the matter there."

Jessie clenched her hands together and looked at him with blazing eyes.

"I don't believe you. I don't believe you are telling me the truth."

A nervous smile crossed Murray's face.

"That is a question for your own discretion," he said. "You will scarcely expect me to argue the point."

"Then tell me who it was."

"I decline most absolutely."

"Mr. West," she said, "I cannot force you, but one who has such a secret can never be my friend."

"Never is a word of infinite meaning. I must be patient, Miss Golding."

"It is not a question of patience, but of justice. Lionel was shot by a coward. I have the right to know his name."

"You will not hear it from me."

"Then friendship between us is impossible. I must decline your further acquaintance."

"As you will. I was prepared for that. Perhaps I think that I should do as you are doing under the circumstances. It is a question each must answer for himself. Let me not intrude further upon your consideration. I wish you good-night. We will be strangers to-morrow, if you wish it."

"Yes," she said, looking him full in the face; "I wish it."

Murray rose and lifted his cap to her. It was

nearly midnight, but few upon the steamer slept. Searchlights flashing from the higher deck showed in their golden arcs a still sea destitute of ships. The engineers worked untiringly, and the clang of the hammers was like a message of hope, heard clearly above the rhythm of the waters.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORM

DAY broke menacingly with a looming bank of cloud upon the western horizon and a blinding sun in a golden haze of uncertain light. Few had slept on board the *Jersey City*, nor could the utmost efforts of officers and crew quite recall that confidence with which even the timid now cross the great Atlantic Ocean. Something had happened, and the future days must differ from these which had passed so restfully and so quickly in the delight of speed and security. Everyone had to assure him or herself that the accident was a common one, and that many an ocean monster had coped with it successfully. But the remoter doubt remained, and even the hardest globe-trotter aboard dared not be entirely at his ease. Those in the state-rooms enjoyed snatches of broken sleep, denied to the less fortunate in the second-class and the steerage. No longer did the rhythm of the propeller invite the lazy ear to rest and forget all else but sea-tuned harmonies. There was no measured rise and fall, no descent so facile into the Avernus of the hollows, no slow and dogged surmounting of the foaming heights; for the ship lay like a black hulk in the trough, and a beam of the morning light, striking down upon her burnished

brasses, declared her heavy labours and mocked her helplessness.

Nevertheless, there was no immediate danger. The captain said so; the chief engineer repeated it; stewards went to staterooms with the story; the busy doctor, that bustling rubicund-jowled Frederick Cooper, told the steerage passengers as much and threatened to dose the cowards with strychnine.

Murray West met the doctor shortly after six o'clock in the morning, and they took their first cup of coffee together before lighting their pipes and going for a constitutional on the promenade deck. Very few were up and about at this time, for daylight sent the fearful to their bunks, and the danger seemed less imminent while the sun shone. These two, however, discussed the situation very frankly, for both were old sailors, and they were not afraid to speak.

"It's an ugly job—a very ugly job," said the doctor, between engulfing attacks upon an enormous briar pipe and unremitting attentions to his matchbox. "Old Ross, our skipper, is an obstinate man, sir, almost as obstinate—yes, sir, almost as obstinate as I am. He won't call in a second opinion until the patient's dead. I know him—why, yes, I know him, and a rum old son of an honest sea-cook it is."

"You mean that he won't get help until the last moment," remarked Murray quietly.

"And not then if he can save this jack-pot, fifty-per cent., grab-the-lot company a single silver sixpence. He's Scotch, sir. When a Scotchman catches

a hawser there's money at his end of it. I know—I know the race. Man, I once tried to borrow a shilling in Edinburgh town—God help me!”

Murray laughed a little sardonically.

“There are no better seamen serving than the Scotch,” he suggested apologetically. “I would sooner be afloat with a Scotchman than with half the gilt-mouthed dandies who strut the bridges at Liverpool. If what the chief engineer says is so, the propeller's gone under and the shaft's hopeless. Ross will make no money keeping us fooling about here. He'll have to get in tow, and the sooner the better.”

The doctor lit his pipe in the shelter of a cowl and made some general remarks, charming and suitable to the situation.

“Oh! trust Neil Ross to throw his money about,” said he. “I can just see the silver dollars rolling. What! Pay a strange hulk the salvage rate from here to Queenstown harbour? He'd let you take his liver first. No, sir; we shall drift three days, and then he'll begin to think about it; we shall drift another three days, and then he'll ask the chief officer's opinion. That's the man. Tell him that there are millionaires in a hurry in his best state suite, and he will name a comfortable climate to which they may betake themselves. You can't bustle him. He'll do what he thinks is his duty to his owners though the stocks fall. That's what I've been saying in the steerage just now. We've a rough lot there, and directly they had the news they were ugly. Talked about being penned up to drown like sheep and other

nonsense. It's odd, though, isn't it? The very poor always seem to care more for their lives than the very rich. Perhaps the rich man thinks his dollars will save him in the end. What! A hundred thousand pounder to die of common vulgar water just like a poor devil who throws himself off Waterloo Bridge! He won't admit that Providence could think so little of him. He must be saved, regardless of cost. The poor man knows that no one cares a twopenny damn about him. He looks after himself in consequence. I don't suppose anyone is going to drown this trip, but it won't be quite a Hudson picnic. Look at yonder sky. That, sir," said the doctor proudly, "that sky spells an hypodermic injection of morphia in the staterooms. Perhaps it means revolvers in the steerage. I'll tell you when the wind comes."

He nodded his head like one greatly pleased with his own evil prophecies, and quite ready for an argument with those who differed from him. Murray, however, was in mood for argument. The situation interested him greatly; the passengers afforded an engrossing and ever-changing study.

"People cross the Atlantic so often now that they never think of danger. Why should they?" he asked. "These big steamers are practically impregnable. We know that there is only a sheet of steel between us and eternity, but we tot up the chances and say it's a million to one upon our ship. Yet, if you come to think of it, the miracle is that accidents are not more frequent. Look at the boats we have spoken since we left New York. It's a highway of traffic, and just ten

minutes' drowsiness on the bridge would work a mischief a man might be afraid to contemplate. Those poor souls crying and groaning in the steerage reckon up the case better than we do. They know that every passage is one big 'if.' They haven't their poker-tables and their whiskies and sodas to put it out of their heads. Perhaps they think the boats are kept for the first class. I shouldn't wonder if they were."

The doctor hastened to contradict such a heresy as that.

"Wild talk, sir!" he cried. "There'll be no class on the *Jersey City* if it comes to the worst. Aye, sir, death is a fine old democrat. Maybe we've over few boats for an ocean picnic; but I'll wait until it comes, sir, and by your leave I'll wash myself. Man, there'll be little water where you and I are going. Let's get a bath while we may."

He laughed heartily at his own joke, and turned to descend the companion by which they might reach the bath-rooms. Here they met the parson, a wild figure in a bathgown and a beaver, and their cheery tones greatly encouraged that good, if troubled, man.

"I am glad to see that it is such a fine day, doctor," the vicar began. His confidence was childlike, and the merry doctor delighted in it.

"It'll blow doormats just now, vicar. Is your will made? Are you quite ready?"

"Ready for what? You don't mean to say—God bless me!—you don't mean to imply that there is any fresh danger?"

"Safe as a balloon—everyone of us. Why, man,

you're not afraid? Let me tell you something; in confidence, mind—strict confidence. Bring nothing but flannel clothing when we take to the boats. It'll never do for the chaplain to take a chill. Zounds! I should feel personally guilty."

He brushed past and went his merry way to the bath-room. Everyone he met felt better for his presence. The ship loved "Freddy," and there was not a man of the crew aboard who would not willingly have risked his life for him. The vicar, however, thought him shallow. He told Murray as much.

"I don't approve of such levity in the face of peril and the Divine displeasure. Dr. Cooper should think more seriously of the suffering souls on board this steamer."

"Are you speaking for yourself, vicar?" was Murray's question.

"I am speaking for a great many who choose that I shall be their mouthpiece. It is very evident to me that the situation is most grave. I shall speak to the captain about it at the breakfast table. Many of us have important engagements in London—Miss Golding, for instance, is about to be married. I am sure that every effort should be made to avoid that which must prove a lamentable delay."

Murray looked him through and through with piercing eyes which seemed to fathom the very depths of his imbecility.

"Oh! of course," he said. "The captain's just a bad lot. Tell him so, and give him some hints. It would be most unfortunate if Miss Golding's wedding

were postponed. Her husband might have to pay for the breakfast, or owe for it, which is the fashion in his set. I should suggest that divers be sent down to fish up the missing propeller. It's no more than a mile or so to the bottom, I think; and they might catch a mermaid. Say, vicar, what a chance for you—eh? A mermaid to lead the anthem on Sunday. She'd have to put her fin in the bag—or would it be her tail? Well, I envy you. Let us go and drown our sorrows in the bath. We may as well die clean, though dirt used to make for holiness. Will you come?"

He turned to look back upon the top step of the companion, but the parson declined the invitation, and went off in some alarm to any who would listen to his tale of woe. He was so entirely unselfish. It was not for himself, but for those dreadful busy men—and for that poor Miss Golding. The Rev. St. John's heart swelled for Jessie, and he appeared to imagine that the world would certainly come to an end if she were not instantly clasped in the arms of the amorous nobleman who pined for her in England.

Jessie in her cabin was quite unaware of this fatherly interest. She had passed a troubled night, but her trouble had no concern whatever with the accident or its possible consequences. She relied so absolutely upon the skill of the officers and the size and majesty of the steamer that the idea of a real calamity never entered her head. Far from it; her unrest, her waking hours, were the fruits of that chance encounter with a man whose personal magnetism she could not resist, resent it as she might. Murray West

stood before her in imagination wherever she turned. She seemed to feel the gaze of his eloquent eyes even in the privacy of her cabin. Nor did she believe that any common chance had thrown them together upon the *Jersey City*. Murray, she said, had been her brother Lionel's friend; he knew how her brother had died. She did not believe, never had believed, that his was the hand by which Lionel fell; but his secrecy piqued her pride, and the masterful habit of speech and act hurt the vanity of one who had been the spoiled child of self-will since her earliest years. Why was he not frank with her? What right had he to command her confidence and exact her obedience? She fretted at her own inability to win from him that servile homage which had followed her everywhere in New York. Was she not the daughter of Bernard Golding, by whose leave men walked about the earth? This Murray West appeared to be unaware of it. He treated her as though her father were the possessor of a mere competence. She determined to put herself beyond his influence so soon as they touched at Liverpool; and reminding herself that she would have much to do when she was married, and that occupation would be good for her, she sat up in her bunk and awoke her Aunt Eva.

"Say, aunt, is it time to get up? Do look at your watch. Mine hasn't got any fingers."

Aunt Eva, the tip of whose nose alone appeared above the bedclothes, indulged in a sustained grumble and turned angrily upon her left side. It made no difference to Jessie.

Please, you're not angry, are you, aunt? I really must get up, dear. Oh, my! Why do ships go up and down?"

Aunt Eva opened her eyes and snapped a response.

"Whatever are you doing, child? Go to bed again this instant. I'm sure it's not six o'clock yet."

"Then it ought to be," said Jessie decidedly. "There's nothing I hate so much as waking up in the middle of the night and finding it isn't breakfast-time. When I live at Monkton Castle—oh, my poor head!—I shall have breakfast going all night. It won't matter then. Nothing will matter for ever afterward. Oh, auntie, I wish I were a fish, a beautiful gold-fish in a marble basin. Wouldn't we save in milliner's bills?"

Aunt Eva sat up and brushed scanty curls from her towering forehead.

"Oh, dear!" she cried. "What a dreadful storm! How can you walk about, Jessie? I'm sure something has happened. I shall certainly send for the captain and inquire."

Jessie drew a shapely stocking over an equally shapely foot, and continued her remarks upon matrimony.

"If Gerald's fond of the sea, I shall get a divorce," she said savagely. "It's all very well to talk about the ups and downs of life, but I'm not wanting any. I feel just as if I could die to slow music and float away on a piece of seaweed. Say, aunt, will you have *pâte-de-foie-gras* for breakfast, or what? Do you think

you could take a little cream if I brought it? Don't mind troubling me, aunt."

Aunt Eva uttered as impious an imprecation as the minister of Yonkers permitted to her, and she groaned aloud when a terrific sea hit the ship, and sent everything in the cabin flying headlong toward the ceiling.

"Gracious me! is the ship sinking, then?"

"Perhaps they're letting down the anchor," said Jessie meekly.

"In the Atlantic Ocean, child? What nonsense!"

"Everything's nonsense, aunt, especially marriage."

"It will only be in the Providence of the good God that you will be married at all, child."

"Then I shall turn Mormon."

Aunt Eva snorted and buried herself in the bed-clothes again.

"This marriage has turned your head, Jessie," she said.

"No," said Jessie decidedly, "but the ship has."

She lapsed into a moody silence, dressing herself carelessly, and gained prettiness by her deshabelle. Anon, as the wind continued to rise and the steamer to roll more heavily in the trough of a rising sea, Jessie ventured to the deserted deck, and discovered the seamen already knotting the safety lines which would be so necessary later when the storm gathered force. Not yet had the captain given the order for all passengers to remain below, but it was expected momentarily, and Jessie herself bore witness to the

need of it directly she quitted the shelter of the great companion—for the gale almost lifted her from her feet, and but for strong arms clasped about her suddenly, she must have suffered an injury. Her fear forbade her for a moment to force herself from that close embrace; but she trembled in spite of herself, and recognised a helplessness she would not readily confess.

“Oh, thank you!” she cried at last.

The Rogue released her, but still kept the fingers of his left hand upon her arm.

“Be careful,” he said, with-a laugh. “You nearly went bundling into the parson’s cabin. I don’t think the reverend gentleman would have been quite prepared to receive you. Nasty morning, isn’t it?—and worse to come.”

Jessie looked at him from under heavy lids which half covered laughing eyes, that the weird light made violet.

“It’s destiny,” she exclaimed petulantly.

“What, that you should knock at the parson’s door?”

“No; that—well, you know, and I shan’t tell you. Let me go, please.”

He released her instantly. The wind blew the hood of her cloak back from her face, and sent the flaxen curls rippling about her little ears. Away, as far as the eye could see, the great Atlantic rollers, each like a wall of jade which the sea foam balustraded, came on in an eternal procession, as though the good ship beckoned them to her destruction. Jessie could not

stand against the anger of the gale. She was beaten backward into the arms which awaited her.

"You are determined to awake the parson, then?"

"Oh, do let me go, Mr. West. Help me downstairs while there's anything left of me!"

"Certainly. Shall it be as a stranger?"

She looked at him almost with tears in her eyes.

"What sent you into my life?" she asked. "Why is it always you when I call out?"

"Accident—plain accident. Just steady yourself by the rope there. That's better. We shall do very well now—as strangers; of course."

He helped her to the head of the great staircase, and there she lurched to one of the seats and sat heavily, the sprays still upon her gown and her cheeks ruddy. Her intention to be silent, wilful, obstinate, melted away before the Rogue's touch and the regard with which his eyes followed her.

"Oh," she said, with a wild endeavour to save appearances and such truant curls as could be captured, "what am I to do now? However am I to get back to my cabin?"

"Much better stay where you are. Less conventional and more airy. Breakfast is not a meal to be appreciated on such a morning as this. I should recommend a cup of tea."

"Why, yes; but who's to bring it? If I could walk on the tight-wire——"

"Unnecessary, and not particularly becoming. I'll bring the tea."

He brought it, and she gulped it down thankfully.

Everywhere on board the cry was for fruit and tea. Cabin stewards looked into the great saloon, and declared that there were not twenty breakfasters. Jessie watched the seaman who came to close the steel shutters over the skylight of the staircase, and, hearing the captain's order that every port must be thus fended, she admitted her uneasiness.

"Is it as bad as that? Are we going to have a real storm?" she asked.

"Something very like it. The wind is almost due west. It should carry us towards the Irish coast, if that's any satisfaction to you."

"But it isn't. I don't want to go to Ireland. I want to go to London to my *fiancé*."

"Ah, that's distressing—a wedding without a bride. Some men, I suppose, wish that they had been married that way. Is Lord Eastry so very impatient?"

"He declares that he can't live another week without me."

"Then consider him already deceased. The ship's helpless. Even if we took a hawser, no tug could tow us in this storm. You will be at least ten days late in London. I sympathise from the very profundity of my heart."

"You don't. I can see that you're rather glad. Why don't you be honest about it?"

"No one is honest about a wedding. The parson who marries you, the bridegroom who declares that the bride is the only woman he ever loved, the bride

who declares that she will be obedient, the old woman who gives you plated spoons and says they are silver—none of these is honest. I should be sorry to prove an exception. When I go to a wedding, being a man, I ask myself whom the bride loves. I am generally rather confident that it is not the bridegroom at the altar—at least, in fifty cases out of a hundred. In your case I should have no doubts whatever.”

“You are very rude!”

“The rudest man you have ever known. Agreed. It is often rude to tell the truth. I know it, but truth is a woman, and should not be lied about. Will you have another cup of tea, or shall I leave you to your own reflections?”

“I won’t have any tea, and you may go away if you want to. Do you really think the ship is in danger? I’d like to know that before you go.”

“Then you have some confidence in my opinion.”

“Yes; I think you’re clever, but horrid.”

“Ah, a masculine combination which is not without its merits. In a woman detestable—I grant it. Let me be equally honest. A steamer of this size goes a long way even in the Atlantic. The only possible danger is our helplessness. We have lost our propeller, and the sails are scarcely as large as your bandana handkerchiefs. If we ran into anything, it would be awkward; but then, you could say the same of a cab in Piccadilly. No, Miss Golding, I do not think at present there is any danger. This storm is troublesome because it keeps us all below decks; but

these ships are like floating islands, and there is no storm yet brewed which of itself could do them any harm.

He stood up, and taking the teacup from her, lifted his hat and turned to leave her.

"*A bientôt!*" he said, and added, "as strangers, of course."

"My!" said Jessie; "I do dislike you!"

Murray went off to his cabin without looking back, and found his friend Laidlaw sitting up in his bunk sipping a strong glass of brandy and water. The two occupied an inside cabin, and the electric light was turned up there; nor could the thunder of the seas upon the steel be heard as clearly as in the staterooms above. The rolling of the ship and the quiver of her plates, however, had already alarmed a man who bartered his nerves for strong drink; and Laidlaw began to question Murray with the feverish restlessness of a coward.

"What's up now?" he cried, almost before the cabin door was shut. "What the——are we rolling about like this for?"

Murray went straight to the bunk and looked at the glass in his friend's hand.

"So you feel that way? A little early, isn't it?"

"I want to know when this rolling tub is going to steam again. Good Lord! we can't drift about here for a week. It's criminal. Why don't they do something?"

"Oh, trust them, they are drinking brandy and soda in their bunks, perhaps. Say, Herbert, you're a

good plucked one, aren't you? Nothing frightens you, my boy. I used to think you were a bit of a man; that was over yonder, before you met Lionel Golding. We'll have to lay in some petticoats now—they're more in your line, it appears."

Laidlaw set the glass down with an oath and rolled himself up in the bedclothes again.

"I don't like you, Murray, when you cant," he said quietly. "You know I'm not as well as I was. Why do you always mention Golding to me? Are you determined to give me up? Well, let it be so. I'll see it through, by——"

Murray sat down by the side of the bunk, and took the feverish hand in his own.

"You know that you are talking nonsense, Herbert. If I shield you, it is because I do not believe that you are altogether guilty. In England you will begin again, at the bottom of the ladder, but, still, you will begin. I shan't start any higher up, for I have no claim at all to do so. Let us forget Lionel Golding from this minute. We can do it if we try."

"Yes; and that sister of his prying about all day. She'll let you forget, Murray. Why, good God! they'd shoot me like a dog if they knew. Are you going to keep it up with her if we land at Liverpool?"

"If we land—well, in that case, she'll just run off to church, and in a week she'll be honeymooning. I want you to leave her out of the account, Herbert. If there is any trouble with Golding's sister, it shall be my affair. Do you suppose I can't manage a bit of a

girl like that? It's no compliment to me that you should think so."

"I don't think it, Murray. You were always a wonder with the women. Say, do you speak about 'if'? Is the chance as black as that? You don't want to frighten me, do you?"

"Nothing of the kind. I wish to be honest with you. This gale is not quite what any of us wished. Here we are, rolling about helplessly, a thousand miles from land, screw gone, rudder broken, and three bits of pocket-handkerchiefs for sails. Ask yourself if a man can be quite easy."

"I've been asking that all night. Do you know, I dreamed that the ship went under just when Jessie Golding knew the truth. You and I were in this cabin talking about it. The water came through the port-hole there like a whirlpool. My hand was out of the bunk, and it touched the jet, and it was cold as ice. We tried to fight our way out, but the door was locked, and then the ship sank, and we heard the decks burst open, and it went dark. It was an awful dream, Murray. I'd sooner throw myself overboard than believe it was true."

Murray regarded his friend a little wistfully. His brow was puckered up, and he appeared to be thinking deeply.

"Dreams are all nonsense," he said presently. "I dreamed almost the same thing, but I know quite well why. We were all thinking of the ship last night; the accident unnerved us. Naturally, we went to bed ready for anything. A dream under those conditions

counts for nothing. It would be perfectly childish to put any faith in it. Get up and eat a beefsteak, Herbert. That's the remedy for dreams. You'll never go through with it if you lie swilling here. Get up, man, and do something. The day's for work, not bed, at your age."

He turned away, and busied himself in the cabin, while Laidlaw struggled out of his bunk and began to dress himself with the languid air of a man who wishes he were still in bed. The rolling steamer, meanwhile, appeared to become more helpless every moment, and listing heavily to port, she lay trembling in the sough like a great wounded lion in a hollow of the jungle. Though none was permitted on the deck who had no good business there, Murray persuaded the second officer to let him up to a shelter by the engineer's skylight, and there, an empty pipe in his mouth and his hands deep in the pockets of his overalls, he watched the enveloping seas and faced the tornado which swept upon the *Jersey City*. So blinding were the mists of driven rain about the sagging ship that the eye could distinguish little beyond the hither mountains of water which the western gale drove headlong upon the doomed vessel. Unnumbered, infinite, those mighty walls of spray and foam and the jasper heart rolled on with thunderous report as of cataracts meeting and great waves riven asunder, and all the appalling revelation of Nature in her mood most terrible. The steamer herself trembled to her very keel-plates; she who had steamed so proudly by the statue of Liberty, the giant of a great company, the maker

of ocean records—now no spar upon the deep sea was tossed with less effort, made more puny or to appear more impotent. Relentlessly the waves rolled over her, flooding her decks with a boiling torrent of mud-brown water, or burst in clouds of the drenching spindrift. No man could stand there who had not a safety-line to his hand; the eyes were blinded, the tongue bitten by the salt, the voice lost in the howling of winds. Murray, unable to face that tempest longer, fought his way to the companion, and said that the ship was doomed. The doctor, meeting him at the ladder's foot, no longer contradicted him.

"They're under water in the steerage," he said. "God help them! They shot at me, and meant it, too. Come forward, will you, and see what's to be done. The captain can't help us; they're working for their lives above. I count upon you men. Trew's with them already. He's a trump, that parson, now it comes to it. I shall sit under him just now. Confound it, sir, he's a man!"

"There's generally something in these public-school men, if you know how to get it out," said Murray, as they went. "Imagine what Napoleon would have been if they had educated him at Eton. Let's go and help the parson—he deserves it."

They descended to the steerage, and beheld a fearful spectacle. A motley crowd—Italians returning to Italy, Frenchmen to France, Germans to London, Irishmen to remembered hovels—lay sprawling about the steerage cabin in all attitudes of fear and rage. Some had drawn their knives and boldly incited their

fellows to fight their way to the decks and handle the ship themselves. Others cried out piteously for a priest and the sacraments; while women, hysterical in fear, raved perpetually or held up children to the doctor that he might first save them. Murray never forgot one burly Irishman, stripped to the waist and armed with a huge bludgeon, who swore by unknown gods that the whole thing was a conspiracy against his nation, and that if the door were not immediately opened, he would open it for himself.

"Will I be put off with heretics?" cried the man, now in anger, now with the irrepressible humour of his race. "What's the black man yonder doing here? Faith, I'd sooner drown with a heathen nigger, and so I've told him. Does he quarrel with me now? Lord love him! I'd break his head for a shilling!"

The parson took a shilling from his pocket, and tossed it to the raving man.

"We'll die on opposite sides of the ship, my good fellow," cried he. "Come, you're a man, and there are women to help. Do you think if there were any talk of dying, our captain would keep us below here? Not a bit of it. We'll dance together in Dublin town yet, and all the better for being friends. Shake hands, my man. You're not for the mermaids yet."

"The divil take me if I am! 'Tis a poor lost Protestant ye are, but sure, they'll keep a cool place for ye if I've any say in it. What can I do to help you, sir?"

"Tell these silly women there's no danger. Some of you play the concertina. I know you can, for I

have heard it. Get your instruments out and make them dance. I'll sing you a song, if you like, though it's years since I sung one. Come, let's have 'Father O'Flynn.' It's the very tune."

The suggestion was received with acclamation by everyone capable of hearing it, and presently the parson began in a full, pleasing voice which resounded through the cabin. One by one the men took up the lilt of the song and forgot their own troubles. Soon those who had been weeping and wailing bestirred themselves and showed laughing faces to the company. An Irishman struck up a wild Erse dance, and instantly feet were going, and a very saturnalia of half-delirious intoxication battled with panic and dismay. The doctor stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and posed as a benevolent spectator.

"Didn't I tell you that parson was a good 'un?" he whispered to Murray. "He's saved the day, by George! I thought it was bullets, and they give me—a fiddle. Well, the two are allies sometimes. Let's sneak off and see what the ladies are doing. It's all right here for another hour or two."

Murray readily assented.

"Yes," he said. "There's no fiddle in the saloon, doctor. Let's go and see the ladies."

They made their way aft with difficulty, for the rolling ship defied even a trained seaman's balance, and more than once Murray found himself embracing the doctor, while the pair of them waltzed serenely toward the first open door or the nearest convenient pillar. Few of the ladies of the ship had left their

bunks upon such a day, but Jessie Golding was already in the saloon, and one of the Casino girls had taken refuge by her side. The doctor pointed to the spectacle with a certain triumph.

"Look," he said. "Fifth Avenue takes the Broadway to its bosom. Isn't the sea a grand old leveller?"

"Yes," said Murray; "sometimes. It doesn't matter much whether you're drowned in the saloon or the steerage so far as I can see. It's equally unpleasant either way."

He crossed over to Jessie's side and addressed the girls as they sat together upon the sofa:

"Not very comfortable, is it?" he asked. "I should have thought your bunks would have been better."

"Just like a man," cried Jessie. "He can't put his feet on the mantelshelf, and he's unhappy."

"Excuse me, while the steamer rolls like this, the indulgence you mention is comparatively easy. A man should be able to walk upon his hands if he really wishes to be a good seaman. At least, he should be a good waltzer. The doctor and I are badly out of practice; we cannot reverse at all. Perhaps you'll give him a lesson when the wind drops."

"Will it ever drop?" cried Jessie dolefully. "My, wouldn't I give something to be on land!"

"Do you think we're safe, sir?" asked the young actress, already abjectly afraid.

Murray answered her with a cheery nod.

"As safe as the stage of the Casino Theatre in New York City. Come, don't think about it. Get your

books. It's always better to do something if you're uneasy."

"I never can," replied the girl pitifully. "It's so dreadful. The thought of the water makes me shudder. Oh, it would be awful if anything happened, wouldn't it?"

Jessie drew the girl's arm through her own and tried to comfort her.

"Don't say horrid things, dear, and don't be foolish," she exclaimed. "If anything happens, I shall expect Mr. West to look after me."

Murray raised his head and looked at her very earnestly.

"Oh!" he cried. "But I shall hold you to that."

She laughed as though it had not been serious.

"What could you do?" she asked him, with just a suspicion of patronage.

"I will tell you when the moment comes," he said.

* * * * *

The gale was at its height by five o'clock that afternoon. Thereafter it abated with almost dramatic suddenness, and a stillness like the aftermath of death prevailed. Where foaming seas had beaten upon the helpless steamer, nothing more than a long Atlantic swell now troubled her. At two o'clock of the following day she lay in a white mist, so dense, so impenetrable, that one man could scarce see another upon her decks. At that hour her searchlights played vainly upon the clouds of vapour, the siren shrieked dolefully, like the wailing of the spirit of the deep. None,

however, but her crew faced the rigours of the night, and those, when opportunity served, asked a little anxiously how long it would be before help was found. Nearly thirty hours had passed now since the accident befell them; but the storm had forbidden even the thought of aid; and it was not until the wind fell and the raging sea abated that weary eyes began to scan the fog which defied them, and unwilling lips to confess the truth of their position. Never once during that long night of watching did Captain Ross quit his place upon the bridge. He was there still at eight o'clock next morning, when, with overwhelming suddenness, the strange ship loomed out of the phantom mists and sent the *Jersey City* to her doom.

One long cry there was, echoing over the still waters like the voice of the lost; then utter, unbroken silence—a drifting hulk in a great wet cloud, and all about the unchanging face of the restless ocean.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MESSENGER OF FATE

MURRAY WEST had been dozing in his bunk when the strange ship struck the *Jersey City*, but he sprang up at once, as though divining the truth, and picking up his clothes haphazard he ran up the companion to learn the best or the worst of it. A few shadowy forms were already visible in the dimly lighted corridor, and here and there men opened their cabin doors to ask excited questions which could not be answered; but none seemed to know quite what had happened, nor was there upon the instant any evidence of panic. The ship herself listed heavily to port, and a rushing sound as of waters eddying provoked nothing more than a grievous suspicion.

Murray sprang up the companion and beat heavily upon the locked doors as he went. One glance at the position of the *Jersey City*, this and the shadow of a tramp steamer cast upon the screen of the fog, satisfied him and sent him below again. Straight as an arrow he went to Jessie's cabin, and there his blows upon her door awakened other sleepers and spread that terrible alarm. Jessie heard them at once and asked, "What is it?" She had been sleeping heavily, but she knew that Murray waked her, and was in some vague way prepared for that summons.

"Dress yourself at once," the cool voice said. "Don't lose a minute; there has been an accident. Get all the ladies you can and take them on the upper deck. I fear it is very bad."

She said, "Yes, yes," and listened to the sound of his footsteps as he passed briskly along the corridor. For an instant, perhaps, she resented this desertion, but the chief officer himself now came below and began to hurry the passengers up; and what with the growing alarm and confusion, the agitated voices, and even the piteous appeals of the timid, her attention was distracted and directed to her own necessities.

"Wake up, aunt," she said, crying a little wildly to her sleeping relative. "Don't you hear them knocking? My! how you do sleep."

Aunt Eva opened her eyes, but she was not permitted to indulge in so much as one pious reflection upon the fitness of things or the indecency of Jessie's behaviour.

"Good Lord, child!" she began, and then, hearing the sound of hurrying footsteps, of men's voices and women's entreaties, she sat bolt upright in her bunk and looked at Jessie as one who could not trust herself to speak.

"Get up, aunt. Why don't you get up when I tell you to? Mr. West's been here. He says we are to go on deck, and I am going right now. Where are your clothes? What have you done with them? Say, aunt, you've got to hurry. This isn't a dinner at Sherry's. Will you get up?"

Jessie was just an American girl even in that

momentous hour of her young life. She did not understand the danger, had not the remotest idea what the summons meant, but she trusted implicitly in the judgment of the man who summoned her, and she was already asking where she could find him.

Murray, in the meantime, had gone from cabin to cabin like some swift messenger of fate, awaking men from their heavy sleep and women from their dreams. He would not be detained nor linger for any questioner. "Get up!" was his message. "The ship is sinking!" In his own cabin he shook Laidlaw roughly by the shoulder, and so dragged him from his bunk.

"We're in collision," he said shortly. "You have not an instant to lose. Shake yourself, man! Wake up! Here, take your coat and carry your boots. Get aft, if you can, and keep out of the crowd. I'll be with you in two shakes."

Laidlaw obeyed like a child; but he trembled while he dressed, and his teeth were chattering.

"You'll stand by me, Murray? You won't leave me, will you, old chap? I can't swim a stroke, you know. Good God! The dream's true, after all. Just think of it—we'll drown like rats. Well, I said this rotten tub was going. Oh! where's my coat? Who's got it?"

Murray did not pay any attention to him. The electric light having already failed them, he groped blindly in the darkness, and from the depths of his cabin trunk he took his revolver and a covered water bottle, such as a trooper uses, and other little necessi-

ties which he believed the night would demand. The bottle he filled maladroitly at the washing-stand, and then, pausing only to take a pocketbook and his watch and chain from beneath his pillow, he bundled Laidlaw out of the cabin, and started off to find Jessie.

"Wait for me by the wheel-house," he cried after the cowed man. "The boats won't take half of us. It's suicide there. We must fish for ourselves."

Laidlaw hesitated a moment, exclaiming, "You'll stand by me, won't you?" but Murray was already out of hearing, and overwhelmed by a sudden consciousness of his isolation and peril Laidlaw climbed the companion and came out upon the terrible decks. Here already the omens of an irretrievable disaster were many. Half-dressed men, death-white women, shivering in the searching mist, laughed or prayed or babbled unceasingly in the first excitement of the truth. The officers moved amongst the throng, silent figures upon a silent errand. In the steerage, where panic had prevailed at the beginning, the graver crisis exercised a sobering influence. The second officer was there and he carried a revolver in his hand.

"The women first, and one by one," he roared at the ladder's head. "If any man goes out of his turn, I will shoot him like a dog. Now, mind that. There's a place for all of you in the boats if you will only keep quiet. Come out now, and behave yourselves."

The women answered him with a low, wailing cry, while some of them thrust their children forward with the piteous entreaty that he would save them. Of the men a few carried themselves with dogged courage.

Life had not been so kind to them that they should fear to lose it; others, however, cursed the captain and the ship and the day which set their faces toward England; while a few, bereft of reason, raged like maniacs, and were held back only by the strong arms of their comrades. As quickly as might be these poor people were brought up to the main deck, and there marshalled into companies. The unbending courage of an English crew seemed to shame the terror even of the weakest, and although the witnesses to fear were not lacking, there was a discipline wholly unlooked for.

Murray had found Jessie at the door of her stateroom, and helping her to collect her wraps, he told her frankly what he thought of the case.

"A steamer ran into us; I think it must have been a tramp. We are struck between the two forward bulkheads, and may last ten minutes. If they stand by us, the mischief won't be much. It depends on that. I am not frightened of the boilers going, for the fires were drawn when the shaft broke. We'll keep out of the mob, and look after ourselves. It is odd, isn't it? I dreamed of this last night, and here I am, doing just what I meant to do. Let me go first; I know the place."

Running on as though he were talking of an everyday occurrence, he took the wraps from the two women and led them along the main deck to that old place by the wheel-house where Richard Marx had made him an offer little more than forty-eight hours ago. Jessie did not understand why he went there, or

why he kept them from the others upon the promenade deck; but she had an unshaken faith in his judgment, and she followed him, despite the zealous third officer, who clutched her aunt by the arm at the very cabin door and thrust her unceremoniously towards the group.

"Now, you ladies, get forward, if you please," was his order. Jessie shrunk from him, and appealed to Murray.

"Shall I go?" she asked. "Do you think it is better?"

He put his hand upon her arm and told her the truth.

"I don't think the boats will hold you all," he said. "I may be wrong."

"But my aunt has gone," she said, a little wildly. And then, "Are we to be separated? Do you think it is wise?"

"I can only use my own judgment. When the propeller broke I thought there might be an accident, and I counted the boats. They won't hold half of us. At the best they will take the women, but it is a poor best. If you trust yourself to me, I will try to save you; but, mark you—it is you alone."

Her upturned face revealed the distress of the doubt and separation. The deepening tragedy found expression in the wailing voice of women and the broken encouragements of men. From the bridge the great searchlight, driven by its own dynamo, still played mockingly as an emblem of power and sovereignty; and its ark fell upon the terror-stricken

company and showed new phases of distress as in some weird light which the hand of death uplifted. All the characters who had played their flippant parts upon the *Jersey City* since she steamed from New York Harbour were here called at time's instant to reveal themselves in this agony of the ultimate trial. Friend scarcely recognised friend at such an hour. Jessie perceived the three dancers from the Casino Theatre lying, huddled together in each other's arms, upon one of the seats of the promenade deck. The "Bantam" addressed them in wild words, scarcely coherent, though well meaning, and not wanting courage. The Rev. St. John Trew, bareheaded in the centre of a willing audience, prayed in a strong melodious voice for those in peril upon the deep. Forward among the steerage passengers someone started the opening verses of a hymn, and the trembling chords floated upward musically in the mist-girt stillness of the night.

Jessie, put to the proof, asked why she should stand apart from those friends who, at least, could solace each other with words of farewell and courage.

"My aunt is there," she exclaimed aloud. "Why should I leave her, Mr. West?"

"I will not say a word to compel you," he answered, frankly. "Perhaps you would be better in the boats—I don't know. It is only my idea, but there are too many. Do you care to wait and see, or to go up at once?"

She did not know what to say to him. Already the great lifeboat had been drawn down from the davits,

and the women were swarming into it. They fought each other like wild animals. Neither the persuasion nor the commands of the officer in charge served to keep the timid back. The boat went down to the water loaded, until its gunnels were lapped by the smallest waves. One young girl in the agony of delay threw herself from the deck, and fell screaming into the sea. They dragged her to the already overloaded boat, and pushed it off.

"Look at that," said Murray quietly. "They will float for an hour if the wind keeps down. When it rises God help them! Some day we shall compel these liners to carry sufficient boats and decent ones. Luck has been their best friend so far. If you think you will go into the boats, do not hesitate to say so. I will get you an early place."

She took a step forward and peered over into the mist. Save for that spreading arc of gold which the searchlight commanded, the sea lapped like a great black carpet beneath the enveloping clouds of rolling mist. The lifeboat itself had been already swallowed up by the dense veil of the fog. It were as though this doomed steamer had been cut off by a pillar of cloud from all the open sea-world about, and its fate hidden in a clinging curtain of black obscurity. Jessie drew back from the scene trembling with the cold.

"Dear God, what shall I do?" she cried in great distress.

Murray pointed to the ladder and to the place where the other women were waiting.

"You shall go into the next boat if you like," he said quietly. "After all, it is only my idea. But it must be the next boat; we shall never launch a third."

"Do you mean that the ship will sink?"

"I mean that it is sinking now."

This had been in his mind all along, though he would not tell her so. He did not believe that the boats would be launched, and now, warned by a sure instinct that the end was at hand, he dragged her aft almost roughly, and coming to the wheel-house he cast off his coat and began his work.

"The life-belts are here," he said, speaking and working at the same time. "Hold up your arms so—now we make them fast. I spotted this raft two days ago, and have regarded it as my property ever since. It will float like a cork. Lucky they've forgotten it, isn't it? See—I am just strong enough to get it down. Now, if you will try and lift that end, we'll get it overboard. There she goes, splendidly. Can you swim, girl? Can you keep yourself afloat for just two minutes? Then over you go—for your life, jump!"

The sentences followed each other broken and disjointed as he cut the raft free from the side of the wheel-house, and with Jessie's aid flung it into the sea. It was one of those rude contrivances of wood and rubber which passenger steamers sometimes carry to satisfy the pleasant officials of an easy-going Board of Trade—a contrivance which few remember in an hour of crisis. There were many of a similar kind on

board the *Jersey City*, but this raft, slung up to the wheel-house, had been forgotten by all save Murray in that hour of emergency. He had marked it yesterday when there came to him the idea that Fate had claimed the steamer, and that she would never see land again; and his foresight enabled him to carry out the plan without a hitch. Working like a navvy, he cut the raft free and cast it into the sea. He believed it to be the only way, and this belief the girl shared when she took one fearful look behind her and realised that which was passing upon the terrible deck.

The hour of discipline had gone by now. As the *Jersey City* settled down by the bows, the steerage passengers came aft with one wild shout, and mingling with the others, they fought their way towards the boats. Neither Captain Ross's trumpet-like command from the bridge nor the revolvers of the officers by the boats kept those panic-stricken people from that which they believed to be the way of safety. One upon the other, pell-mell, trampling the women down, they surged along the promenade deck and took their stands by the gangway. Fierce cries were heard, curses, imprecations, the report of pistols, and the screams of the dying. But the mob prevailed, and the timid few were driven down toward the water and death.

All this Jessie saw while she heard Murray's frantic cry that she would save herself.

"Jump or drown!" he shouted, almost brutally, for he knew that but an instant lay between her and life. "Jump or drown! You must take the choice!"

She suppressed a cry, clinging to him for an instant in one last appeal. She did not lack the courage to battle for her life; but the black sea below her, the lapping water, the chilling mist, and above all this the belief that death would claim her anyway, drove her back from the ship's side and left her cowering at his feet.

"I can't! Oh, my God, I dare not!"

Murray stooped, and lifted her in his arms.

"I will take the risk for you," he said quietly, and holding her close to him, he clambered up the bulwarks and leapt into the sea. Jessie felt the water surging in her ears like a torrent of ice. She thought that she was sinking down, down, as though a great weight held her remorselessly. This was death, she said, and as the intolerable pain in her lungs increased and visions passed swiftly through her brain, she fell to thinking of the most trivial things, as drowning people will sometimes do. Odd faces passed in review before her; she recalled the last "good-bye" she had spoken to her betrothed when he sailed in the *Teutonic* from New York. She could hear his laugh like a gurgling of water, and this sound recurred and recurred until it became as a mania of the mind which she could not shake off. In the end she lost consciousness, and remembered nothing more until she opened her eyes to discover the cloud of white vapour for her heaven and the still sea for her cradle. She did not realise for a little instant of time what had happened, or why the sea rocked her thus in such a chill embrace. A strong arm lifted her up and put a flask to her lips.

She knew that she was drinking brandy, but the fire of it made her shudder.

"Don't!" she cried protestingly, and pushing the flask away. "It chokes me. Please leave me alone."

Murray let the pretty head sink upon his knees, and curling himself up upon the fragile raft he peered out into the darkness as one who had found a stronghold and would protect it. An ominous silence everywhere prevailed. His keen ear could not detect the splash of an oar or any human voice. The *Jersey City*, he saw, lay at the bottom of the Atlantic, a thousand fathoms down, it might be. In a week or less London and the cities would blaze with the newspaper reports of that calamity. He wondered who would live to relate that story truly. A man of iron nerves, the dreadful isolation, the peril of his position, appalled even him. But this frail raft, six feet square, perhaps between them and eternity! His arm unconsciously closed about the girlish figure upon his knees, and vainly he sought to shield it from the night.

"The brandy would do you good," he said at last. "I wish you would try to drink it."

She raised herself with an effort, and escaping from his close embrace, she cast one quick glance all about her; and then, as though terrified by what she saw, sank down again and hid the terror from her sight.

"The steamer has sunk, then?"

"It went down five minutes ago. We were just in time to escape the vortex. There are some saved, I trust. Two boats got away. I hope our friends were in one of them."

"Oh, I hope so—I hope so!" she said, trembling while she spoke. "I will not believe they are all lost."

"The fog is so thick I could see little. If the tramp stood by, there should be many saved. I hope she did—but we mustn't think of it now. We have ourselves to look after, and we want all our courage. If the wind will keep down, it's all right. I shall lash you to the raft in either case, because it's safer, and we might sleep."

Jessie wondered that he could speak of sleep at such a time; but the night had been kinder to her than to him, and she was still unnerved by the terrible tragedy of which he had been the unwilling witness. Not passively had he come to the possession even of so frail a shelter. Others strove for it with him; strong swimmers battling for their lives; drowning men clutching at the hope; even the dead, whom the sea washed to that haven. But Murray drove them away without pity. He had a woman to save, and he thought of no other. A third upon it would have sunk the raft, he said. Why should two perish that a third might die with them? So he thrust the drowning men down, and beat the swimmers off, and unloosed the hands of the dead, which had closed half convulsively upon his own. The inanimate figure at his side robbed him of the common impulses of the human instinct. He fought for her; he cared nothing who died if she might live.

He had gained the raft, as he said, but a moment before the steamer plunged headlong; and dragging Jessie upon it, he took the short paddle with which he

had provided it and plied it for dear life to escape the vortex of the whirlpool. The ship sank by the bow, so that her stern stood up for an instant high above the swell, ere it was engulfed in a chasm of foam and rushing eddies. Two of the boilers burst as she went down, and in the path of that explosion fire was shot towards the heavens, like some signal of her dire distress. It was ironical, Murray said, that her great searchlight should burn almost to the last, and rocking its arc of translucent beams should show the frenzied faces of the drowning, and arms thrust up above the still sea, and the dark shapes of those whose eyes were down-turned, toward the tombs which awaited them. But thus it was; and even as the steamer went, the great arc seemed to linger an instant, and then to be rolled away like a quivering carpet of watered gold which an unseen hand snatched up.

The steamer sank with a roar of escaping steam and a shuddering cry from five hundred throats, and that last mighty crash of sounds which her rending decks gave out. Thereafter for many minutes no voice was heard, no eddying of waters, nor any movement of the lapping swells. The drenching fog muted the piteous cries, and shut out the awful scene. Murray, kneeling upon the raft and chafing the deadened limbs of the woman he had saved, saw nothing of that which befell upon the hither sea, nor would he hear the distracted voices of those in their agony. The task he had set himself seemed already to bear this bitter fruit of death and regret, for he believed that

Jessie was dying, and he worked with the strength and frenzy of a madman for her recovery. When at last she opened her eyes, he ceased his occupation like a man discovered in a guilty act. The sweat fell from him like rain. He feared that he would slip from the raft, so great was his exhaustion.

"You speak of sleep," she said, taking up the thread of their talk when long minutes had passed. "Do you think you and I will ever wake again, Mr. West? I don't; I don't think I want to, either. My, how cold I am—how cold!"

"I understand what you feel," he said, driven a little way towards despair in spite of himself. "That's why I wanted you to drink the brandy. We'll get the inside of these oilskins dry when the sun comes up, but we must try and keep going until then. I wonder if you could use the paddle? It would keep you warm if you could. There's nothing like exercise when you are wet. I remember once being in a tight place in the Dolomites. An Oxford don and myself kept ourselves warm on a six-inch ledge by riding imaginary bicycles with our dangling heels. It looked ridiculous, but it was useful. Pickwick, you know, when he fell through the ice, ran for the cup. I wish we had some of that warm punch here now. Just the old milk stuff, with plenty of rum in it. I guess we have got to wait. If there's rum and milk on board the steamer that picks us up, I will brew you some. Now just try to work this paddle. You will get wet, but you'll keep warm. Do you think you can? Well, try."

He went on like a man who must divert her

thoughts at the expense of his own reputation for common sense. Jessie knew that he was talking nonsense, but she did not resent it. Obeying him without question, she took the paddle in her numbed hands, and began to scull vigorously. The raft answered to her touch, and turned clumsily in the lazy swells. She ceased her labour to laugh at its results.

"It is just a circus, and you are the audience," she exclaimed defiantly. "What *are* we going to do, Mr. West? Where will it end?"

"It will end upon the deck of the first steamer that has the decency to come this way. I don't pretend to imitate that humbug the ancient mariner; but this fog promises fine weather, and fine weather is everything to us. Look! The clouds are drifting already, and there is our old friend the Great Bear. It is only at sea that a landsman remembers the stars. He has a sentimental regard for the moon, and he records the hours of sunshine in his newspapers; but the stars he leaves for melodrama. It is odd, too, because to my mind there is no suggestion of infinity so wonderful or so awful as that of the stars. Just look up yonder. Millions of worlds, an infinite number—peoples, cities, kingdoms, just the same little pettifogging troubles, perhaps, as we have here below. Or is it something altogether different, and all that we see—suns and stars and this great celestial sphere—but the heart of a greater world of which we do not even know the nature? My thoughts go that way whenever the pointers show me the North Star. I ask myself if the secret is eternal or merely for a day. If death an-

swers that question, then my curiosity has been the neighbour of knowledge more than once in my life. Destiny evidently intended me to be a tailor. I remember six positively thrilling escapes, and this is the seventh. If it were the ninth, I should be uneasy."

Jessie ceased to row that she might ask him a frank question.

"What did you do in America?" she said. "Why were you there? I think I should like to know, if you won't hate me for the question."

"Not at all; much better ask it than think it. I went to America to make a fortune. A good many were there on the same errand. We did not always agree. I believed in change of occupations, and necessity saw to it that I was obliged. Some day I will write a book for you: just the career of a man who lands in New York with 6½d. I will show you how he can turn his hand to anything on God's earth—float a mine, run a bar, be the attractive genius of a dive, black a millionaire's boots, cook for a cattle ranch, start a city, run a paper, break a prison—in fact, live through a melodrama, and come out with a whole skin and some shreds of character. If you don't agree with that, I will not be hard on you; but I am going to ask you a question in turn. What made you call me the Rogue? Why did you do it, unless you had good reason? Oh! I know you did. It is astonishing how fast malice travels, and always straight back to the victim. It is just like an electric current: the positive pole to set it going, and the negative to

receive it. I knew what you were calling me the very first night you did it. Now let's hear you defend yourself."

Jessie turned her face away.

"I don't defend myself," she said doggedly, "and you should never ask a woman for reasons. If we called you a Rogue, it was because of the others, your friends. Don't you think they deserved it?"

"Perhaps; it is a question of degree. One man plays poker with railway stocks, and is made mayor of his city; another plays poker with dollars in an observation car, and is shot in the leg. I never judge superficially. Decent men will do strange things for money. I am not going to judge Richard Marx to-night, and I will tell you why. He is dead, Miss Golding."

She shuddered at the words, and sat for a little while silent and afraid. She would not ask how Marx had died, nor could she hide it from herself that all the common proportions of life were changed in that dreadful hour. Wealth and station and the trivial ambitions stood so far away. A surpassing sense of loneliness and isolation froze her heart. She tried to tell herself that there was hope, but the voice of the sea mocked her. She did not believe, had she but tried herself, that she would see the sun again.

"Yes, yes, you are right," she said. "I will judge no one to-night, and I am sorry, Mr. West; I am really sorry for what I said."

"There is no need to be that. We shall understand each other by-and-by. I often think it is a good sign

if you take to anyone slowly. First impressions of men—and, for that matter, of women too—aren't worth much. I saw one of the Rothschilds once in a bathing gown, and I gave him twopence to get me a towel. He brought it. The instinct of the race was too strong."

She laughed in spite of herself, while Murray dived into the pocket of an oilskin coat and produced a pipe and tobacco pouch.

"Do you know," he said, "that I planned all this nearly thirty hours ago? It is true, though. I knew it was an off-chance, but I took it. A helpless ship in an ocean highway, rudder gone, and a heavy sea. I said she might be struck. Well, she has been. She's gone, and here am I just as I saw it all."

"Do you mean to say that I figured in your calculations?"

"No one else. I was three hours prying about the ship for some sort of raft which no one else would remember. I saw a hencoop forward which would have been the very thing, but it was too heavy, and I could not lift it. All the rafts on the promenade deck were so hitched up that a squad of marines could not have set them free. I went aft and found this thing bent up to the wheel-house. 'It is just the thing,' said I, 'and Jessie will have to put up with it.'"

"You said 'Jessie.'"

"I took the liberty. It occurred to me that if two people were drifting round on a six-foot plank, the common formalities would sound a bit out of place. 'I shall call her Jessie, and she will call me Murray,'

I said. 'When we are picked up we can be strangers again; that will be very natural. She is going to England to marry Lord Eastry, and I am going to the devil. Perhaps the roads don't lie so far apart, but I must not say so. The first thing is life; the formalities may come afterwards.' So, I was telling you, I spotted the raft, and after dinner the night before last I hitched these two lifebelts on to it and strapped my oilskins just where we found them. It wasn't possible to do much in the way of provisioning, but I have got a water-bottle, three tins of Bovril, and just as much biscuit as I could lay hands upon. We shall make an *al fresco* meal, and feel better for it; but we are not going to cut the ropes, for we don't know what might happen. We shall only loose them—just so."

He cast off the end of the rope which lashed his own body and hers, and thus getting some freedom of movement, he took his treasures from the canvas bag and spread them upon the tarpaulin sheet which was a part of the raft.

The banks of chilling fog had now been carried away by a light breeze from the south, and all the arc of the heavens was revealed with its radiant stars. Deep and infinitely blue, that mighty vault, thus uncurtained, seemed to uplift their hearts and to awaken new hopes. Jessie asked herself if, after all, she had not the right to hope.

"Why," she cried, "it is just a picnic on the Hudson; and I do dote on Bovril, especially when you must eat it with your fingers. Oh, but it was thought-

ful of you to think of it all. It wanted a man for that."

"Of course it did. What else are men for? The thinking women belong to a past age. Hate me, but admit that it's true. In America no woman ever thinks. She does the first thing that comes into her head, and isn't sorry for it afterwards. I like your women, though, chiefly for their impudence. There is nothing in heaven or earth which an American girl respects, except the dressmaker. You are a new thing in life—quite delightful, utterly shallow, and generally dangerous. You kill your men at forty, and they like it. In England we are beginning to imitate you—God help us!—but we shall never be more than poor imitators, for our homing instinct is too strong. Now perhaps you will take some brandy; I prescribe it, and I intend to be obeyed."

He poured a little brandy into the cup of the flask, and mixing it with water from the leather bottle, he forced it upon her. She drained it to the last drop, and returning the cup to his hands, admitted the excellence of his prescription.

"See here," she cried, "it is just like drinking fireworks; and oh! Mr. West, you will never marry an American girl, will you?"

"Most decidedly not, in the ordinary course of things. Please don't call me Mr. West—my name is Murray."

"Then Mr. Murray."

"The 'Mr.' is superfluous."

"But I feel so awkward."

"Practice," he said, "will make it easy. Come—try."

"Well, Murray, then. Oh! isn't it ridiculous? What are 'ordinary conditions'?"

"That I am sound and sane in mind and body, and that the American girl is of the ordinary type."

"Why, and what's that?" she asked.

"Flaxen-haired, frivolous, expensive, shallow, ambitious, gaudy, incapable of affection, unworthy of love. That is the common type."

"You think so? Well, I don't. I just love the American girls. I am sure they are lovable, and that is the best thing about them. Now isn't it so?"

Murray covered a biscuit with Bovril from the tin, and commanded her to eat it.

"When you are through with that," he said, "I will listen. No doubt you have something to say for them."

Jessie finished the biscuit to the last crumb, and then dusted her shrinking lap.

"The American girl is clever," she said. "You can't deny that. She is not afraid to go anywhere, and she has plenty of moral courage. When I was twenty I travelled from Rome to London alone, and just held my own all along. The young English girl wouldn't do that. She'd want an aunt and two brothers, and then she'd be frightened. We don't care for anyone, and that helps us along. I'm sure you will see more pretty women at Newport any day in the season than you will see in England in the year."

We know how to dress, and we don't make up, just because heaven has been kind to us and we don't need it. Then you say we're not fond of our homes. It isn't true, except among a very few silly people who call themselves smart. There is more real home life in America than anywhere, and I don't care who says there isn't. We're very fond of pleasure—but why should we not be? Do you think it is a virtue to be sad? I don't. If a nation is light-hearted, it is happy. We are rich, but we cannot help that. You would not love us any more if we were poor, and you would not talk about us. It is just envy, and we can laugh at it. If you think the American girl cares, why, I tell you she does not. You can marry her, and then you say she is flippant. Why don't you stop in England, and find your wives there? I believe in results, and when I see my people everywhere I don't care what is said about them. When I get to London—oh, my! shall I ever get to London?—I will tell Lord Eastry what you have said. If he thinks the same, I shall go back to New York.”

“If he thinks it, you may be sure he won't tell you so. He is a charming man, but I should be surprised to hear that he has any brains to think at all. Of course we must get you to London in time for the wedding. It will depend on the ship that picks us up. If we caught a home-going steamer, it would be glorious; but anyway, I'll try and persuade the captain to put us on the road. We are right in the track of ocean-going steamers here, and I don't think anything can happen to us. Look how beautifully

calm it is. It's just as though the sea said, 'I will help you.' "

Jessie looked away at the ridges of foamless water and thought, indeed, that they justified him. The sea would help her. She knew not why or how; but she dared to believe that some kindly fate watched over her and would lift her up even from this menace of the waves. Such a faith in the hour of peril has saved many lives. We know sometimes whether life or death awaits us; and every act of ours, the course we embark upon or the course we shun, is made or taken or relinquished at the dictates of an obedience we can neither limit nor command. Jessie believed that some miracle would save her. She was not ashamed to confess as much.

"Oh, yes," she said; "the sea says that, and I'm listening all the time. Do you know, Mr. West——"

" 'Murray,' I think you said."

"Well, Mr. Murray——"

"Without the unnecessary prefix."

"Oh, then, Murray, if you like—I shall learn by-and-by. Do you know, we've been talking a great deal of nonsense, and shall I tell you why?"

"I'm all ears to know."

"Why, just to make me forget all this. It's brave of you—yes. But as if one could forget! Think of it——"

"The very last thing you should do. I forbid you to think of it. That's why so many people have no nerves—they think of it. No; you and I are going to try a new plan. We are not going to think of it at

all. Here's a smooth sea and a warm south wind, and a starry night, and a foothold that will keep us above water, however much it blows. Why should we think of it at all? Just a few hours of cold and wet, and then the dawn, and a steamer on our sky line; and hey for London and St. Paul of Knightsbridge. That's the case, if you must think of it. I'd much rather that you slept."

"Sleep! Oh, dear God, how could I sleep?"

The exclamation, betraying the depth of her suffering, escaped her despite a resolute determination. Murray pretended not to hear it; but the words struck him like the blow of a knife.

"We can do anything if we try—at least, the school-books say so, and perhaps they don't lie so badly. I know that I am a dreadful chatterer, but I will reform. Let me try to make you comfortable. We'll take watch and watch about, like the seamen do. You sleep until you wake, and I'll sleep afterwards. I'm going to make my ample chest into a pillow. Why, see, formalities may be left on shore to-night, and you'll sleep just so. If I don't keep you warm, wake up and tell me so. Man's a clumsy brute any time, but he's particularly ridiculous when he handles a woman."

Jessie looked at him in amused astonishment.

"Am I to be sent to bed like a child?"

"Just so; like a child that has caught cold and must be nursed."

"But you are cold too; your hands are like ice."

"Leave me out of the question; my hide is

pachydermatous. I have the digestion of an ostrich, and the skin of a polar bear. Please do as I tell you. I am the captain of this ship."

Jessie hesitated for an instant, and then obeyed him without another word. His own acts were methodical and prudent. He drew tight the ropes which bound them to the raft; and, lashing them again and again, he knotted them at last so that even a hurricane would not unloose them. The wraps with which he covered the shivering girl were the oilskins from his own back, and the large tarpaulin which he himself had provided. Satisfied at last that he had done all possible, he drew the girl close in his arms and pressed her trembling limbs to his own.

"Now," he said, "it is my watch. The sooner you sleep, the sooner shall I. Will you obey me, Jessie?"

"Yes," she said, and she knew not why the answer pleased her; "yes, I will obey you, Murray."

She lay in that strange embrace—the embrace of a man who must be a stranger to her hereafter; and as the blood began to course more swiftly through her veins and a sense of security to quieten her mind, she gradually lost consciousness in that middle state which is neither sleep nor wakefulness, but only a great content with time and place and the desire of rest. At last she slept, and in her dreams she thought that she sailed the seas alone, and that he had left her, and that she cried pitifully for his return, but that no voice answered her. No ship sailed upon that dark horizon—none but the figure of fate, which passed her by unheard. Jessie remembered the dream long after-

wards. She would set it side by side with the truth, and wonder what links in that chain of shadows escaped her.

But Murray sat like some figure of stone, motionless, the red light from his pipe glowing ever and anon in the darkness, his face immovable and betraying no emotions. None watching him might have said whether love or hate, hope or despair, suffering or content, dominated his mind and dictated his acts. From time to time he scanned the horizon with the quick eyes of a man who had been both hunted and hunter; and from that he would look down upon the child's face lying so near his heart, and pressing the figure still closer to him would resume his old attitude of stubborn patience and the fatalist's indifference.

Dawn found him thus, when a lagging sun came up from a bank of cloud, and all the waste of waters spread out before him like a revelation of the infinite. He turned his haggard eyes east and west, north and south, but beheld no ship. And the raft drifted helplessly, a thousand miles from land on the lonely desert of the ocean.

CHAPTER IX

A BLUE CLOUD DRIFTING

CAPTAIN KEEN lay all his length upon the red velvet sofa of the chart-room, which is next door to his own cabin upon the bridge deck of the ocean steamer *Royal Scot*. It was two bells in the first dog-watch, and about the captain's customary hour for a jug of tea and a more or less genial reckoning with his first mate, Fenton, the one able officer upon his ship. From dinner-time until this hour no one dared as much as to whisper in the neighbourhood of the captain's bivouac. He was studying the beatitudes the men said, and he needed a third glass of neat whiskey to keep them in his head. A fourth glass led him sometimes to insane outbreaks, when he would emerge from the chart-room with a great riding-whip in his hand, and striding about the deck like a maniac slash the crew right and left until blood flowed beneath their shirts, and they ran from him screaming like women. A little man, he had the manner and the strength of a great bully, and his horrible evil eye, his deformed left arm, and his fearful oaths obtained for him a mastery which mere physical superiority might never have achieved. Complaints and threats were alike a matter

of supreme indifference to him. If a seaman spoke of courts and a Board of Trade, he knocked him down out of hand. "You're the board, and I'm the trade," he used to say, playfully; and the terrible whip cut the man's flesh and left him groaning upon the deck.

That these things should be done upon an ocean steamship in the first days of the twentieth century has been the subject of great marvelling now that Captain Tod Keen's exploits are more widely known, and Germany and America have nearly come to blows over the adventure he embarked upon. The plain fact was that the *Royal Scot* could not rightly have been called either royal or Scottish; but was just a substantial ocean tramp bought by the insurgents of Venezuela to run a cargo of arms to the Gulf of Parai, and was at the very moment we discover her prepared to show her heels to any warship that should be espied upon her horizon, be it American or Venezuelan or British. Manned by a crew of many nationalities, Swedes and niggers, and Germans and octoroons, there was no common action possible against her captain's brutalities; for Sweden would laugh when a nigger was down, and Germany guffawed that Sweden's back should be lashed. So Captain Keen stormed the decks, bellowing and striking and playing the maniac's part, and none but Fenton withstood him—Fenton, the silent, sleek-haired Englishman, who never answered, never argued, but only looked. Tod Keen turned away from that glance as though it would burn him where he stood. He never lifted a

hand against Fenton; he knew by instinct that such a blow would probably be the last he would ever strike.

It is Captain Keen, then, whom we find in the chart-room of the *Royal Scot* at two bells in the first dog-watch upon a breezy day in the Atlantic Ocean. A whiskey decanter close to his hand, he wore a gaudy uniform; and a cap with a golden eagle for its badge was tilted back upon his spikey red hair as he lay. Strange to say, of all books in the world, a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress" rested upon his knees; but do not assume that the little man was reading it or contemplating the virtues of Christian and the narrow way. Not at all; he covered the margins of its leaves with certain mundane calculations, and those concerned his own profits when the arms which the good ship carries should be safely landed at the gulf and the crew of nondescripts were sent packing. Captain Keen figured it out that he would make nearly ten thousand pounds, while Fenton's profit should be one-third of his own. Already he schemed how to swindle Fenton of his share, and add it to his own. "It is to be done," Captain Keen said; but how it was to be done his whiskey-fuddled brain refused to tell him. At this exciting moment that Fenton entered—a freckle-faced man from Grimsbytown, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired, with the shoulders of one born to the sea life, and a servant of it from his youth up. His manner was perhaps scarcely as well controlled as usual. He spoke first, and that was an unusual thing for him to do.

"Come to report, sir. There's a haze of smoke on the port bow, and it looks like a small boat afire."

"Well, let it burn. What's it to do with me? I ain't in it."

"No, sir," said Fenton; "I am quite aware of that."

"Then what do you come whimpering here for? Am I to be trotted out every time a porpoise dives? What's the boat to do with me?"

Fenton was quite accustomed to this kind of question, and he replied without any display of temper whatever.

"The boat's got this to do with you--there's a man and woman alive in it. Shall I tell the hands to stand by, or will you?"

Captain Keen laughed a little brutally.

"You ought to have been a girl, Fenton," said he. "You'd have looked well in petticoats, by thunder! What do you suppose I'm going to do? Waste a day cruising around for poor shipwrecked mariners, when every hour's precious? Let 'em burn or drown. I don't care a dime."

Fenton regarded him with undisguised contempt.

"Then I'll give the order myself," he said, with insistent firmness. "The men are waiting for it. You will have a poor time with them if you hold out, sir."

"What! Do the swine show their teeth? Just you point out to me the man that does it. I have got a whip somewhere; I'll look for it. Here, give me a hand yourself. That back of mine catches me if I get up sudden. Let's see what it's all about."

Fenton smiled, but gave him his hand, nevertheless,

for he knew that Captain Keen's back generally afflicted him in this way after his third glass of whiskey.

From the bridge, above which rose the chart-house, they had a fine view of the narrow decks below and of the great expanse of the sea, now white with surging rollers. A group of the hands stood in the bows peering out at a heavy cloud some mile and a half away to port; and the second officer—a mere lad by the name of Kelly—had fixed this object with his glass. He was an American from Gloucester, who had passed no examination, but who was good enough for Captain Keen and the *Royal Scot*.

"I can't make it out, sir," he said, when the two came up. "The seas run too high. It looks to me like a hencoop, and that's a signal, right enough."

Captain Keen put up his glass and observed the distant cloud for some time without speaking. There certainly was a drift of fine smoke rolling away in thin blue wreaths upon the freshening breeze; but what lay beneath the smoke? Whether it were boat or raft or merely burning timber those on the bridge could not for some time make out.

"Better lower a boat and have done with it, sir," said Fenton quietly.

Keen pretended not to hear him.

"An old barrel half burnt out, as likely as not," he said, to make a pretence of decency. "You'll be running after the duckweed next. What makes you think there is anyone alive there?"

"My eyes, sir," said Fenton coolly. "I can see a man standing up."

There was a low cry of "Aye, aye!" from the men grouped forward, and they did not take any pains at all to hide their uneasiness.

There are few sailors afloat, whatever be their nationality, good men or bad, honest or rogues, who will turn their backs upon a shipmate in need; and the crew of the *Royal Scot* were no exception. Fenton, watching them very closely, put the question once more.

"Better hold on, sir, and have done with it."

Captain Keen said, "Very well," and the bell to "stand by" rang loudly in the engine-room. The sea was fresh and choppy, but they got a boat down without much difficulty, and Kelly, the second officer, took charge of her.

Captain Keen's last words to him were a threat.

"If you don't come back inside an hour, I'll leave you to find your own way in," he bawled. "It would do some of you good to work a bit, you lazy hounds!"

He waited until the boat was lost to view behind a towering wave before he entered his cabin, and cried to the cook to bring his tea. When the half-caste, who waited upon him, hurried up with the tea things, Captain Keen amiably kicked him down the ladder and sent the hot water after him, to keep him in a proper frame of mind. He was out on the bridge again in ten minutes' time stamping and bellowing like a trapped bull; and his inseparable companion, the whip, whistled through the air within an inch of

Fenton's ear. At this, however, the chief officer turned like lightning, and taking a step towards his chief, he raised his glass as though he contemplated knocking his captain's brains out.

"For two pins I'd throw you into the sea," he said savagely. "Go into your cabin, you drunken beast!"

Thus brought to bay, the drunkard leant against the chart-room window, and laughed foolishly.

"Did I touch you?" he asked incoherently. "Non-sense! That's my joke; you know it is."

"Then you play it on someone else. I am not taking any."

"All right, Fenton. You needn't be so uppish. Where's the boat? What are those dirty niggers doing?"

"They are bringing a man and woman on board here. You had better remember your company manners, if you ever had any."

"A woman? Don't play the tender-foot on me, Fenton. How has a woman got there? You are lying."

"Then I learned the habit from you. If you don't believe me, look yonder."

Captain Keen lurched to the end of the bridge and steadied himself against the indicator to take another look through his spyglass. The boat certainly was returning. From time to time you saw it mounting the crest of a wave and then slipping down, like a car upon a rail, into the mighty hollows. As it came nearer, Tod Keen began in his muddled way to

realise what had happened. Six men had manned the boat when she left the ship; he counted eight people in her as she returned, and the figure of one huddled up in the stern was undoubtedly that of a woman. The discovery sobered the captain in a moment.

"Why, here's a game!" he said, turning on Fenton with an uncouth laugh. "It's a woman, as sure as thunder. What are we to do with her, Fenton? A woman, to be the solace and comfort of my old age. Oh, my stars! What a turn about!"

Fenton turned his back upon him, and he went on jesting coarsely and repeating his idle speculations; and presently he roared to the boatsman below to send the steward to him.

"Here you, get the cabin aft the galley clear. Do you hear me, you son of a dirty swab? Get it clear before I come and set about you. There's a lady coming aboard. Make ready for her—do you hear? And tell that lubber of a cook to get his kettle going. Ho! ho! A lady! If this don't beat all!"

The idea amused him very much, and appealing also to his vanity, he went into his cabin, as he put it, to "clean himself." Fenton on the bridge heard him puffing and blowing as he slushed his face with water and brushed his bristly hair with the vigour of a well-fed barber.

Meanwhile the lookout had hailed the boat. Fenton at the bridge's end obtained his first glimpse of Jessie as she lay half inanimate, drenched to the skin and very pale, in Murray's arms.

"The gangway ladder, men," he shouted. "Over

with it! Some of you help the lady up. Now then, quick's the word."

Seamen all the world over love to help a woman, and there were a dozen sturdy volunteers at the ladder's head when Murray, holding Jessie in his arms, stepped out of the boat and began to climb.

"Thank you—thank you," he said to them all. "I can do very well with just a hand. That's it, my good fellow. Ah! if you knew what this meant to us—nine hours in the water, and nine out! Oh, yes; the smoke was a blue light I popped in my pocket just before going over—smoke's better than fire when the sun shines, isn't it? Is that the captain? No. Well, I'd like to thank him, of course. I'm just wet, my man—wet to the very bone. Oh, the young lady will pull through all right. Much obliged. Now, if you have any hot brandy—and blankets, heaps and piles of blankets. Are there any women on the ship? Do you carry a stewardess? What? A negress? Well, she'll do; men are so clumsy—hands like iron bars. Is this the way? Thank you—thank you."

It all came in a breath, the honest gratitude, the joy, the thankfulness of a man snatched from the very jaws of death, yet speaking less for himself than for the life whose life he had cherished with such sacrifice and self-devotion. Jessie, to be sure, had swooned when help came at last; hope long baffled, the agony of the doubt, the dreadful trial, ending in this ultimate deliverance, had required some such reaction; but it was nothing worse than a swoon, and when they carried her into the cabin, and the old

negress had stripped and rolled her in the blankets, and willing hands had chafed her lifeless limbs, she opened her eyes and asked for Murray.

"Is that the gentleman who carried you aboard? Well, he's sleeping, miss."

She looked up in amazement—the cabin, the faces, how strange they were! For seven long hours the sea had been washing her limbs, and the rime of the spindrift had caked in salt flakes upon her lips. Jessie did not realise her safety even yet.

"Who is this man?" she asked of the old negress.

"That am de captain, missie—our own kind captain hisself."

"Then take him out of my cabin at once."

"No offence, miss," stammered Keen, who had been quick to push his way in. "You're my guest, you know. 'Pon my life, I'm very glad. Say the word, and the whole ship's yours. Would you fancy a bottle of champagne now? We've some aboard——"

"Go away," said Jessie indignantly. "Go away at once."

"Oh, well, I'm only trying to do my best. Don't you be frightened to send for me if you want me. I am off to see your friend. Or is he your brother? Well, it doesn't matter, anyway. He is looking pretty bad, poor chap. I guess he will be glad of a little spirit to mix with the water he has swallowed. Now you make yourself quite at home on this ship. You are the only white woman here, and we have not much accommodation for ladies, but such as it is you are

welcome to it. Make that old hag bustle. It'll do her good to trot round awhile."

Captain Keen nodded affably as though greatly pleased at his own condescension, and stepping out of the cabin, he greeted Fenton with an inane leer.

"Getting through my pow-wow," he said meaningly; and then he asked, "What have you done with the man?"

"Put him in the cabin next to mine," said Fenton drily.

"Oh! parlour manners. Well, I suppose it is all right. I'll go and have a jaw with him. A lanky-looking sort of a ragged-tailed poet, isn't he? I wonder if he's her brother?"

"You'd better ask him," said Fenton.

The reticent first officer did not deem it necessary to explain that his foot had helped the lazy crew to clear the cabin and prepare it for this unexpected passenger; but Fenton had liked the stranger from the first and done his best for him. When Captain Keen introduced himself to Murray the Rogue was up to his neck in blankets, and a steaming glass of hot rum and water simmered by his side. He was still in that excited state which attends nervous reaction, and he talked away without a break of the accident and its incidents.

"We broke a propeller three days ago, and lay like a hulk. A fog came down, and I smelt collisions. There weren't enough boats, so I looked after myself. The girl and I were nearly twenty hours on that raft. We don't want a bath to-day! I think not! It began

to blow this morning, and the water went right over us. She's a rare plucky one, too; never said a word, not when we sighted three ships running and could not speak them. Say, Captain, you've got to help her. She's booked through to London, and marriage is the port. You'll do what you can, I know; you are such good chaps, you sailors. We'll speak of it to-morrow. I shall lose my teeth if I can't keep this chatter down. Thunder! that's good stuff—it warms like fire."

So he went on, while Captain Keen sat himself on the opposite bunk, and swinging his short legs like a man who was very pleased with himself, took a good look at his guest and tried to sum him up.

"See here," he said at last, "that's all right. You are welcome aboard and we'll do what we can; but my port's Charleston, and I guess that's not the road to London. Perhaps you'll begin by telling me who the girl is, and what flag she sails under. I must know that, sir, if I'm to help her."

Under other circumstances, perhaps, Murray would have hesitated to tell him much about Jessie, but he was scarcely master of himself to-day, and he spoke freely.

"She's Jessie Golding, the daughter of Golding, the Railway King. You've heard of him, and perhaps of her. She's to marry young Lord Eastry, who cut capers in New York last Christmas; and she's to do it in fifteen days' time if it can be done. We've all got to pull together and see her through. Perhaps you will speak a ship and transfer her. I know you will

if you can—you are such good chaps. As for me, my port doesn't matter a dime. East or west, I don't care a red cent, but we must get the girl through; for she's counting on it."

Captain Keen watched him with half-closed eyes, and ears which did not miss a word.

"Guess you are concerned, aren't you?" he observed shrewdly. "What's it all to do with you, sir? Are you a relative—cousin, or anything of that sort? You seem mighty keen?"

"Oh," said Murray, as though trying to convince himself, "I'll give her the chance, anyway. We chummed on the ship, and that's the whole of it. I never spoke a word to her until three days ago, and when she's married I don't suppose I shall speak another. We are in your hands now, you know. I'm sure a woman won't appeal to you in vain. She's a plucky little girl—one of the right sort. You do your best for her, and I'll see you don't lose by it."

Captain Keen screwed up his eyes still more, and tried to get the tangled threads which troubled his silly brain.

"Oh! The old man would pay something, I suppose, if I got her through?"

"I'm sure he would; and, what's more, I'll give you five hundred myself."

"That's a decent sum. Have you got it with you?"

"If I had not I should not offer it. You just think it all over and tell me to-morrow. Man, I'm tired—dead tired. I simply must sleep."

Captain Keen took the hint and went towards the

door, still thinking of the proposition. That Jessie Golding, the Railway King's daughter, was aboard his ship was something to set a hundred wild ideas going in his head. Five hundred pounds by no means represented their imaginative value.

"Well," he said, "I'll think it over and see what's to be done. You just sleep. By the looks of you, you want it pretty badly."

He left the cabin, and Murray, rolling himself up in his blankets, slept for ten hours like a tired dog. When he awoke his body was all aglow in a gentle perspiration, and, although he suffered from a sense of weakness and fatigue, his head was clear and his old manner had returned to him. He would have dressed but for the fact that his clothes had been carried away by willing hands to the engine room to be dried; and in default of them, he laid his head back upon the pillow, and tried to reckon up his situation. His first exclamation was upon the folly which had led him to speak so freely to the captain of the ship.

"I deserve three months," he admitted frettingly. "A child would have kept the story back. This man's a shark; I can read his eye. He was scheming all the time how to get money out of old Golding. I should have kept my mouth shut. Well, it can't be helped. What's the steamer, I wonder? Probably an old tramp. Well, I'll just wait. A man without clothes isn't good for much. I wonder how Jessie is? Yes, she's a rare plucky 'un—a rare good plucky 'un."

He sighed and stretched out his hand for his watch, which someone had hung at the bunk's head.

"Honest, anyway," he said to himself, and then he opened the little sovereign purse and counted the sovereigns. "Nothing gone there. Not much of a crew, then. Better the sailor better the thief, any day. I wonder if that little captain's a rogue? Yes, I wonder."

The opening of his cabin door cut short this idle speculation, and he raised himself in his bed to see Fenton, the first officer, standing on the threshold a little apologetically.

"Come in—come in," cried Murray cheerily. "It's good to see a face. You are the chief officer, I suppose?"

Fenton came into the cabin, and shut the door quietly.

"Yes, that's my berth," he said, with some reticence. "I thought I'd just look in to see how you were doing"

"Slept like a top," said Murray brightly. "All my worldly wants are a suit of clothes and a cup of coffee. Some of you perhaps will be able to oblige me."

Fenton came up to the bed concealing something in his hand. His manner was a little awkward and embarrassed, and he appeared to choose his words with difficulty.

"I thought you'd be glad to have a talk to me," he began. "The captain's turned in, so we shan't be interrupted."

It was quite an ordinary remark, but Murray, long trained to shrewdness in his judgment of men, divined

the situation instantly. This officer had come there to exchange confidences with him. Well, he was all ears.

"I am much obliged to you," he said frankly. "Men of that kind are better in their beds. So your port's Charleston, and we shan't be in the way of London-bound ships? I am sorry for that. I have promised Miss Golding to get her to London as soon as possible."

Fenton sat on the bunk just where Captain Keen had sat last night, and a doubting smile crossed his face.

"You are right to be sorry," he said very slowly. "If it's getting to London that troubles you, you'll want it all. As to our port—well, Charleston sounds as well as anywhere else, I suppose."

"Do you mean to say that your port is not Charleston?"

"I do, sir. I mean that it's God knows where, and the American Navy."

Murray whistled, and lay full length in his bed.

"In that case," said he, "we shall have to wait."

"You certainly will, unless you can persuade Keen to put you ashore at Martinique."

"Then he touches at Martinique?"

"He has given me to understand so—when he is drunk."

"Ha! Drink's the matter, is it?"

"It is, sir, and plenty of it. Keep the young lady out of his way when he is drunk. That's plainly put and honest Yorkshire."

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Murray was silent for some time, but presently he said:

"My name's West. What's yours?"

"Oh, just Jack Fenton—that's what they call me."

"Then, Jack, sir, I will borrow a suit of your clothes until my own are dried. Can you let me have them at once?"

"I will send them down right now. There's something else. We found this empty pocket-book in your jacket, and here's your revolver."

He stood up and put the pistol into Murray's hand.

"Keep it loaded," he said with a nod. "You might want it."

CHAPTER X

CAPTAIN KEEN ASKS A QUESTION

THE fresh breeze had blown itself out during the night, and the morning broke in radiant freshness with a silvery spraying sea and a cloudless sky and the glory of the sunbeams on the water.

Jessie, in crumpled, shrunken clothes, with an old woman's bonnet for her hat and a seaman's oilskin about her pretty shoulders, was out on the deck at an early hour, and espying Murray by the wheel-house, she ran to him with both her arms extended and asked him to laugh with her.

"My!" she cried, "isn't it just glorious? Look at me, Murray—look at my bonnet, look at my fifty-guinea Paquin." And then, her laughter passing in a moment, a shadow crossed her face, and she said, "Have they any news? Is anything known of the others? Does the captain think they were saved? Oh, if one knew—if one only knew."

He held both her hands for an instant, and then, linking his arm in hers, he fell to promenading the deck and trying to reassure her.

"We shan't know anything until we land, one side or the other. It would be impossible. I shall hope for the best until I hear the worst, and you must do the

same, Jessie. Now, wouldn't it be quite absurd to believe bad news until it is proved to be true? The ship went down on a calm night, and it is very likely that the tramp which sunk her stood by. I believe, at any rate, that the women were saved. Let's pray God it is so, and forget it. What I am thinking about is our own position. This ship's bound for Charleston—at least, they say so. It's a long way from London, and unless I can persuade the captain to tranship us you will be late after all. Well, I have done my best—admit it."

"A thousand times yes," she answered him; and, seeming to reflect upon it for some while in silence, she asked him a little wistfully: "Do you wish me in London so very much, Murray?"

"What makes you ask me that?" said Murray, not trusting himself to look at her.

"Why, you make me ask it. Ever since we left the ship it's been nothing but London, London, London—we must be in London. Well, I don't care about London very much just now. I don't care about anything, except that I'm alive."

"Oh, of course, that's natural. The immediate is sometimes more absorbing than the future, but not often. You're so thankful to be aboard here that you don't think of anything else. I can quite understand it, but I have a duty to perform toward you, nevertheless. For the present you are to regard me as friend, brother, father if you like, and in that position I shall demand obedience."

"Oh! you will demand it?"

"Yes, and be obeyed. Admit that I am a determined person when I set my mind upon a thing. I see plainly that it is my duty to escort you to London, and there to put you into the hands either of your relatives or of Lord Eastry. I should prefer the former, but the latter will do."

"How contemptuously you speak of him!"

"Forgive me—I don't do any such thing. No man has the right to speak to a woman contemptuously of her *fiancé*—unless she provokes him. Monkton Castle, I believe, is a splendid place. You have a picture gallery as long as a race track, and old masters enough to make the reputation of a city. You can't have everything, Jessie. If you feel yourself able to take up this great position, you are wise to do so; you are certainly clever enough to hold it, and the choice is your own. All that I insist upon is that you make your choice under circumstances which cannot influence you falsely. By which I mean, that mere sentiment is to have no say in it, and that you shall be a perfectly free agent when you choose."

"Then you don't consider me a free agent here?"

"Far from it. My own lucky opportunities of serving you influence you, for one thing; you rate them altogether above their value. Then you are naturally excited by it all, and things are out of proportion. In London, among your friends, it will be different. I shall leave you there and you will be free."

"You really mean to leave me?"

"I am quite resolved. It is the best course for both of us."

He felt the little arm quiver upon his own, and the pretty fingers which touched his hand almost in a caress were withdrawn. Murray would have given many years of his life could he have turned and taken the pitiful figure in his arms and whispered that protest of his love which all his iron will scarcely could restrain. But he was a man who, whatever his past had been, remained faithful to the first teachings of a gentle chivalry towards women; and he would have counted himself a rogue indeed had he used this opportunity to his own ends or claimed an advantage of these very services which accident had made possible. In London, he said to himself, it might be different. Jessie, it is true, would there be compelled to hear the reproaches of her friends, and that devilish philosophy which concerns itself with the celestial arrangement of marriages and the heavenly desire for settlements and diamonds. Perhaps, even, she would be unable to withstand the force of those circumstances, and would become Lord Eastray's wife. This thought dried up in an instant the wellspring of his new-found happiness, and left him passionless and cold as marble. Life had not failed to teach him how to forget, though the lesson had been bitter enough.

And of what, we may ask, was Jessie thinking as they trod the decks together, and the ship ploughed the grey-blue sea and her eyes were turned towards the cloudless horizon? How she altogether conquered

that reservation which attended all her intercourse with Murray since the first day she had been on board the *Jersey City*. Perhaps, she did not wholly know. Her sense of gratitude was supreme, and it blotted out all else. The mystery of his life in some sense fascinated her, and would have fascinated her altogether if she could have disassociated it from her brother Lionel's death. But suspicion, which, once invited, is induced to leave its human tenement reluctantly, defied her confidence, and would thrust itself upon her with its whispered calumny: "Does he speak the truth—the whole truth?" Had she known that Murray had been an actor, even impassively, in that tragedy, she would never have spoken to him again. His persistent refusal to speak of Lionel's death both tortured and excited her. Why was he silent? Whom was he shielding? These questions she could not answer, and when she could put them from her, then only did her heart go out to this strong will, and she thought that she could submit to it gladly. No other man had so influenced, none caused her to think so deeply in hours so few. Had he told her but one page of his past, set her doubts for ever at rest, she would have held out her arms to him without shame, have said, "I love you." But his habit of mystery baffled her, and she came at last to believe that the curtain would never be drawn back.

* * * * *

Captain Keen found them together at the door of Jessie's cabin just before eight bells—his first appear-

ance upon the deck that day; and when Jessie had gone in to leave her wraps, he addressed Murray in his customary morning manner.

"Well, my man, and what are you hanging about here for?"

Murray turned as though a man had fired a pistol at him. He neither understood the question nor its meaning.

"Did you address me, sir?" he asked in his astonishment.

"I did so, sir. Are you engaged to this lady?"

Murray stepped back and looked the fellow up and down.

"You impertinent little hound!" he said, and then stopped for want of words. Captain Keen took two steps towards him and raised his fist.

"Now, you march," he said, "and while that lady's on board this ship you keep on the other side. Do you hear me?"

"Yes," said Murray, very quietly, "I hear you and—let me see. I know your face, Captain. Yes, I've seen it before. Now, where?"

He put out his hand and gripped the little man by the arm, turning him round as though he would see his face more clearly. His grip was like that of a vice upon wood.

"Oh, yes," he said, shaking his man until his teeth chattered. "I've seen your face before, and now I know. It was in St. Louis gaol, three years ago, my man, three years ago last January. Shall I go on—eh? Are you anxious?"

Captain Keen strode off to the chart-house raving like a lunatic. Fenton watched him there, loading his pistols ; and he said to himself, "There's not room for these two on this ship, not by a long way."

CHAPTER XI

THE ATTACK

MURRAY saw no more of the captain that morning, nor did interest inspire him to make inquiries. He had already realised the danger of his situation, and it needed but this supreme touch of irony, he said, to cap the misfortunes of that unlucky voyage. He knew perfectly well that his life, if it were valued by Captain Keen, would not be worth an hour's purchase; and while he was well able to take care of himself, and had been too often in tight places to make overmuch of this one, his fears for Jessie were very real and harassing. As in a flash he understood their position—a ship making for an unknown port, arms its cargo, the Venezuelan insurgents its probable commissioners, ruffians of all kinds its crew, and a rogue for its skipper. The adventures of the *Ban Righ* were too fresh in his memory that he should make any mistake about the *Royal Scot*. She would run for any South American port that would serve her purpose, he imagined, and there hand over her cargo of arms to those who would pay a high price for the service. Some acquaintance with the history and present condition of the neglected pastime of blockade-running led him to anticipate that the war ships of three nations

would sink the *Royal Scot* on sight; while, should she escape them, General Castro, the rebel President of Venezuela, would shoot her crew and enjoy the recreation. Nor would the insurgents themselves, with General Matos at their head, be less ready to dig graves for friends so embarrassing—a conclusion which made it quite plain why such a low ruffian as Captain Keen found himself the master of this ragged tailed crew, and even of Fenton, the one honest man among them. Murray liked Fenton from the first; and when that somewhat morose officer came to his cabin after lunch to smoke a cigar with him, he offered him the welcome of one comrade to another.

“Mr. Fenton,” said he, “I’ll make no bones about the matter. You and I are in the same boat together this voyage, and we are going to see each other through. Just sit down and make yourself as comfortable as you can. My cigars are all about five hundred fathoms down, so I can’t offer you one; but I will borrow a pipe of your tobacco, if you will let me, and you can see to the grog. Just sit right here, and let’s talk freely. From what I know you may not be altogether displeased that I came aboard. I judge as much from what you said this morning.”

Fenton sat on the bunk and pitched his cap upon the blankets beside him. He had already ordered the steward to bring them coffee and brandy, and when their pipes were lighted he asked after Jessie.

“I hope the young lady’s better, sir. The right kind of young woman that—the right kind altogether. But I am sorry she’s on this ship, Mr. West,

and I don't disguise it from you. There's not anything floating between New York and the Nore that I wouldn't sooner have hailed than the *Royal Scot*—I mean, if I'd been in your shoes."

A shadow of annoyance passed over Murray's face, and he lit his pipe somewhat impatiently.

"Yes, that's so," he said a little shortly. "A rogue of a ship and a drunken man in charge of her—not exactly a craft for a pretty woman to be hanging about, I admit it. The question is, since we are here, what the devil are we going to do? I am one man against about thirty, and the odds are picturesque. You will stand by me, Mr. Fenton? I've counted on you from the first."

Fenton nodded his head; he was pleased that their talk should be quite frank.

"He's lifting his elbow in the chart-room now," he said, indicating Tod Keen. "What he might do against you when he's filled up I can't rightly say; but you must keep both eyes open. I told you as much this morning. He's a very dangerous man; and there isn't much law or order where he is going to. That's what I fear for the young lady, sir. If they put her ashore at Caracas, God help her."

Murray blew a cloud of smoke into the air and followed it with his eyes as it floated upward. When he spoke again he showed how clearly he understood the danger.

"I'll tell you what, Fenton," he said. "I am going to buy the crew, if money can do it. That has been in my head since the start—the money to be paid in

New York or London according to opportunity. You say you've thirty aboard? Well, I'll spring one hundred pounds a man, which is three thousand pounds, sir, if you will tot it up. Now that is a sensible offer. They stand by me if it should come to it, and I pay them one hundred pounds a man as soon as opportunity says 'yes.' The rest is their own business—they may sink or swim for all I care, and General Castro may go to the devil. I take it that you are just running blind, and that the first warship you see will drill holes in you. If that's so, the men should bite. But you are the best judge."

Fenton thought it over for a little while. This solution of the difficulty had not occurred to him, and he did not quite know what to say.

"It's a pretty tidy idea, but what security are you going to offer the men? Will they take your word? I think not. Five dollars on this ship would go further than a bond for five thousand. And mind, you've got to reckon with the skipper himself. He won't wait your convenience, depend upon it, and a whisper of this would set the fireworks going. You must think of that before you speak the crew."

"Be sure I will; it's been in my mind all along. As for the money—well, I have ten thousand dollars in my clothes somewhere, and a half of it shall go to the crew to-day. They must take my word for the rest—that or nothing. On their side the promise either to tranship me or to compel this man to touch at a West Indian port; on mine, one hundred pounds a man within three days of my being able to telegraph to

London. I'll give you a bond for it now, and you shall witness it. It would hold in law, I think, and I believe the men will trust me. Try them, Fenton; we'll just try them."

They discussed it at length, weighing the *pros* and *cons* and all the dangerous chances; and when Fenton had brought pens and ink, and this odd document had been drawn up, they both signed it and asked themselves for the first time what should be done with it.

"If you give it to the crew," Fenton said, "he will flog it out of them. I can't carry it, for he will be on to me first. What are you going to do with it, Mr. West? We must know that."

Murray had thought of this, and the difficulty did not perplex him at all.

"I am going to put it, Fenton, where all the crew will know of it, but where he cannot touch it. Let me think of it until to-night. Just you go round and sound the men, or let that German carpenter do it. Trust a German if there are any dollars flying round. I will take care of Captain Keen; he's in good hands."

Fenton went away to his watch much perplexed by such an odd commission, and Murray crossed the deck to Jessie's cabin to tell her that it was tea-time. She had slept through the long afternoon, and was the better for her sleep; nor had she any suspicion about the ship or its officers. A blind confidence in Murray answered all her difficulties; she did not believe that there was any difficulty which he could not surmount. And when Keen addressed her with incoherent civilities or passed Murray by without a word, she neither

remarked it nor was conscious of affront. Murray, meanwhile, began to perceive that the situation as between the captain and himself must be dealt with without any more delay, and he went to his cabin at ten o'clock that night more anxious perhaps than he had ever been in the whole course of his adventurous life.

It was ten o'clock, we say, when he turned in, after an ostentatious "good-night" to the captain, and nearly an hour later before his preparations were finished. Some good instinct told him that the night would bring the first open declaration of hostilities; and although he had already made a hasty examination of his cabin when he first entered it, he now examined it again, testing the bolts and sounding the panels, and bringing an old traveler's eye to bear upon it. The lock of the door was good—he did not anticipate that it would be forced; but there was a little window giving upon the deck which interested Murray greatly. This casement swung upon a bar, and when it stood in a horizontal position it left plenty of room for a hand to pass through it. Murray measured the window carefully, and having done so, he closed it, but did not bolt it. The revolver which Fenton had returned to him was in his hip pocket. He now opened the chambers, and warmed the cartridges at the little oil lamp swinging from the ceiling, and not until he had satisfied himself that they were dry did he extinguish the flame and make himself a rude bed upon the floor. The conviction that his life would be attempted was too strong within him

to permit carelessness, but his keen observation showed him that no bullet could touch him where he lay, and for two hours he slept the heavy sleep of a tired man. When he awoke the watch was being changed, and he could hear the oaths of the officers getting the men up from below. Thoroughly awake now, he stood up and shook himself, and when the sound of rushing footsteps had died down and the measured silence of the watch fell again, he slipped from his cabin, and darting across the deck, he concealed himself behind the engine-room cowl, from which place he watched the place he had left as a cat would watch a mouse-hole.

The night was wondrously fine, with a spreading heaven of a mackerel-cloud and a wan light of stars shining through the vistas. A fresh wind blew from a point south of west, and the ship rose and fell to the long swell with the cradle song of swishing seas and foaming bows dear to every sailor. There was no light in Jessie's cabin; and thinking of her asleep, of the part she had played in his life, remembering that another man waited for her in London, or, it might be, already said that she was dead, a great tenderness towards her filled his heart, and he wondered that he had not already claimed that supreme title to share such hours as these.

Murray was thinking of Jessie still when the shadow of a man fell suddenly upon the deck. He had looked for it, and he did not start nor turn his head when the shadow moved across his face. This was the hour of which he had been so sure, he knew

that it must come; and perhaps he welcomed it as a token of finality. There before him was the little drunken captain in whose power the lives and fortunes of so many lay. Murray observed that he wore a suit of oilskins with a great sou'-wester almost covering his face, and that he smoked a cigar apparently with great enjoyment. For some time, indeed, Captain Keen paced up and down the deserted deck as though well pleased with himself and with his occupation. Once or twice he stopped to exchange a word with the aft lookout; but at last, becoming a little impatient, he sent the man upon some difficult errand below, and then walked straight to Murray's cabin and tried the little window with nervous fingers. Murray could scarcely repress a laugh while he watched this interesting operation.

"Go on, my man," he said to himself. "Now quietly, if you please. Just pull it, so. That's it. Ha! you've a knife, then? Yes, that would do for me. What— another? You murdering little hound!"

It befell almost exactly as he had anticipated when he quitted the cabin. The little man, half mad with drink, opened the cabin window with fingers trained to stealth, and, drawing a sheath knife from his belt, he inserted his bare arm through the opening and struck three savage blows at the bunk below. Then, as quickly, he withdrew his arm and listened for a long instant at the open window. The knife was still in his hand, his ear bent down, when Murray fired; and the bullet, skimming his fingers, sent the knife flying from his hand and left it shining in a patch of

moonlight at his feet. He turned with the bark of a wounded hound, and, trying to find his revolver, roared drunken defiance at the darkness.

"You —— Britisher, where are you? Oh, hell! If I could see you, you——"

Murray did not wait for a second invitation, but, covering him with his pistol, he advanced boldly into the moonlight.

"You murdering little hound! Come, hands up—up with them. What! You won't! Then, by heaven, it's your last chance."

He fired a second shot with a hand as steady as steel, and the bullet, skimming the drunken man's ear, sobered him in a moment. He held his hands straight up, and the blood from his wounded finger dropped upon his chalk-white face.

"Don't shoot, for God's sake!" he roared. "Is that what you want?"

"Pretty well," said Murray, with satisfaction. "You need exercise, my man. Let's see you dance—come, lift them up. Now, then, let's see you waltz—one, two, three, you certainly will get shot in the toes. Ah! that's better—that's what's good for you."

He lifted his pistol and fired two shots while he spoke, and Captain Keen, who had seen this amusement before in the dives of St. Louis and many a time in Jackson City, began sullenly to lift up his feet and to lurch about the deck like a wounded bear. His hand was all bloody, for the flesh above the knuckles had been shot clean away, and the bruised bones were showing; but there was no mistaking the meaning in

that pair of eyes which fixed themselves upon him like the eyes of a hawk, and never for an instant ceased, as it were, to burn him with their steadfast gaze. Cursing until his lips frothed, the beads of a deathly perspiration upon his brow, he danced for dear life; and the watch below, wakened in its sleep, joined the watch above and formed a silent, well-satisfied ring about him. Not a man there would have lifted a hand for Tod Keen's sake had a rope been round his neck and the gallows raised. "Let the sot dance," they said. And dance he did, until, exhausted as much by fear as by loss of blood, he fell headlong into the scuppers and the men closed round him, and for the first time their tongues were loosed. Murray, however, answered no questions, but strode across the deck to Jessie's cabin, and awoke her at the first knock.

"What is it?" she asked him. "What has happened, Murray?"

"A great deal. Please dress yourself, and go straight up to the bridge. You'll find me there."

He did not linger another instant, but slipped up the bridge ladder and there met Fenton at the very door of the chart-room. What the chief officer had seen or heard Murray never learned until the end. His demeanour was as impassive as ever; the scene upon the deck below was scarcely understood by him as yet, but when he did understand it, and Murray stood beside him, his clear voice was heard giving an order which none at present dared to disobey.

"What's that, bo'sun? What's going on down there?"

"The captain shot, sir—right off in a dead faint. He don't speak a word. Precious bad he seems to be."

"Carry him into the first cabin handy—that open door yonder will do. Carry him in there."

"That's the passenger's, sir."

A dozen voices chimed in to cry, "Aye, the passenger shot him certain." But Fenton would not hear them.

"I'm coming down," he said. "Just bustle, some of you. What's it all about? What's happened?"

A Babel of voices arose to tell him the story, and while they contradicted each other and shouted and wrangled as seamen will, Fenton seized the opportunity to whisper a word to Murray.

"Get into the chart-room; I'll send the lady up. You were very foolish, Mr. West."

"Premature, if you like—not foolish. I suppose we'll have this lot against us sooner or later. Well, it can't be helped. Here's Miss Golding—I'm glad of that."

Jessie came up the ladder at the words, and it was plain that she had both heard and witnessed the amazing scene on the deck below. Her hasty toilet betrayed her agitation, and her pretty flaxen hair was half wild about her shoulders.

"What is it, Murray?" she asked, quickly. "What has happened to Captain Keen? Is he wounded—is he hurt? Why did you send for me?"

Murray knew that this was the time to tell her all, for the truth was no longer to be kept, and he must hold her henceforth at his side.

"The matter's this," he said shortly. "Captain Keen is just a murderer, and I've done him an injustice by keeping alive. He tried to stab me in my cabin—well, he didn't, and here we are. It's a tight place, Jessie, and you must obey my orders. I want you to go into that chart-room, and not to come out until I give you leave. I think it necessary, or I wouldn't ask you."

Jessie lifted her astonished eyes, and for an instant he caught a silhouette of her girlish face—the high, white forehead with the flaxen curls about it, the well-shaped tiny ears, the firm chin and dimpled cheeks. She was pale, but quite silent. Never for one instant had she imagined that a woman could be in peril upon an English ship.

"Murray, what are you saying? He tried to kill you—Captain Keen! No, it's too terrible."

"Possibly, but quite true. Anyway, he didn't succeed, and that's what I'm concerned about. Go into the chart-room, Jessie, and wait for me. I want to talk to the crew. If we can square them, it's all right. I don't think it will be difficult, but you mustn't be here when I do it—that's all."

She went into the cabin without another word, and Murray strode to the end of the bridge and peered down upon the deck. He could hear Fenton's voice and that of the Irish bo'sun, who was talking loudly and with passion; but the others remained in a sullen group about the door of the cabin whereto the captain had been carried. Kelly, the second officer, was among them, and he now came up to the bridge, pipe

in his mouth, and with an abrupt word to Murray he took over the watch.

"Mr. Fenton says the captain isn't hurt, sir. Is that so?"

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Murray. "He tried to murder me."

Kelly whistled, and then gave the course to the quartermaster who was at the wheel. The crew, meanwhile, strolled up to the ladder's foot one by one, and taking advantage of the opportunity, Murray addressed them.

"Lads," he said, "I want you to witness that to-night's trouble isn't any work of mine. Your skipper tried to murder me in my bunk. I don't know what I've done to him, and I don't much care, but if you help him you'll hang, and that's plain truth. I tell you what, my lads. I've written this story out, and it's gone where Captain Keen will never find it—into the sea, for the first ship bound for the States to pick it up. You didn't think of that, some of you; but I saw what your captain was when I came aboard. I looked out for myself accordingly. Now see, here you stand by me, and there's a hundred pounds a man for you at Lloyds, in London or New York as you wish it. If you want the other thing, well and good; but I'm thinking that you're sensible fellows, who'll stand by a friend and not risk your lives for a gang of cut-throats who'll let you sink or swim when this cargo's run. Just think it over, my lads. There's plenty of time, and you may come and tell me in the morning if you'll take that money or leave it. That's

all I've got to say, except this, that if your steward will step up the ladder and take an order of mine I'll give him a five-pound note."

They heard him in silence, their pipes glowing in the darkness and their hands in their pockets. As they had come so they went, man by man to their bunks, leaving but the lookouts and the quartermaster on the moonlit deck. Murray thought at first that the steward would not respond to the bribe; but when some minutes had passed that worthy came a little shamefacedly up the ladder, and Fenton was at his heels to keep him going.

"Did you send for me, sir?"

"Yes," said Murray brusquely. "Look at that—do you know what it is, my man?"

"Guess it's a hundred dollar bill, sir."

"Nothing less. Now, see here—what I want is food and drink: coffee, tinned beef, biscuit, water, and a spirit stove and kettle. If you'll throw in three bottles of whiskey, I'll add twenty-five dollars."

"I've no orders from the captain, sir."

"The captain is drunk, sir. Mr. Fenton will give you the orders."

"Is that so, Mr. Fenton?"

Fenton, driven this way and that, said curtly, "Yes, that's so;" and the man went down the ladder like lightning. Ten minutes had not passed before the provisions were heaped up on the chart-room table and the dollar bills had passed.

"That will do," said Murray quietly. "You will now attend to Captain Keen. Let me know when he is

sober, and I'll pay another twenty-five dollars. Is that your price?"

Fenton said, "Too much," under his breath; and when the man was gone he sat upon the bunk and wiped the sweat from his face. A poor oil-lamp lit up the chart-room dimly. Jessie, half believing, half incredulous, sat in Captain Keen's own chair at the table whereon the chart of the course was laid, while Murray stood at the door as though afraid to leave the bridge for an instant.

"Fenton," he said drily, "we'll just have to see this thing out. Which way are the men going? You should know that."

Fenton was equally laconic.

"Against you," he replied, with no more apparent interest than an intimation of breakfast would have caused him. "They're going against you, Mr. West."

"Right—then it's watch and watch about. Don't you fear any consequences, Fenton; it's my business all through. This ship's breaking the law every knot, and when Captain Keen goes to a court of justice, we'll have a pleasure party. You look after Miss Golding. We men can take the other cabin, and this shall be hers."

He appealed to Jessie, asking her if she would sleep; but she shook her head, and told him to leave her out of his calculations.

"They won't hurt me, surely, Murray. It's of you I'm thinking."

"Then don't think of me. We're all right until morning, and a sober man will be easier to deal with."

I haven't a moment's doubt of it. There'll be no attack to-night."

She would have answered him, but Fenton sprang up while he was still speaking, and gripping Murray's arm, he pointed to the bridge.

"Look out!" he said. "The ladder——"

Murray turned as a shadow fell upon the boards, and running out, he met Captain Keen face to face.

CHAPTER XII

JESSIE'S WATCH

THE ruffian was almost at the ladder's head when Fenton gave the alarm, and there followed at his heels the more honourable cut-throats of the *Royal Scot*—a heterogeneous medley of Germans, niggers, and even Chinese, whom money had attracted to his ambiguous flag. These men, it may be, but half understood the bribe which had been offered to them, or, understanding it, they doubted that it was anything but a lure to trap them. Faithful for the moment to the man who had hired them, their fidelity was partly the seaman's tradition, partly the belief that Keen would recover his ship and make them pay a heavy price for their defection. For that matter they hung together resolutely, while they asked who the stranger might be that he should strut the bridge like any flag admiral; and no sooner was Keen on his legs again than they drew their knives and followed him headlong to the ladder's foot. It would be short work up there, they said; and as for the woman, well, the captain would look after her, in which pleasant resolution their ardour was its own enemy, for they shuffled heavily upon the deck, and Fenton's quick ear detected them.

Murray was at the ladder's head in a single stride. He had taken his pistol from the table as he ran out, and his first exclamation was a bitter one upon the folly which had led him to waste good cartridges in mere calisthenic exercises. But one barrel of the six remained loaded, and while he cried back to Fenton to pass him another revolver, he fired point-blank at the mass of men upon the ladder, and saw one go down in the very middle of the press. The bullets which answered him sang wildly above his head, shivering the skylight of the chart-room and even drilling the great funnel behind it; but these Murray had been ready for, and stooping swiftly as he came out he with the same movement locked his arms in Captain Keen's, and in that terrible embrace he blocked the ladder's head and kept the bridge clear. Not a shot could be fired now from the deck below, nor could any pass up the ladder; while those who clutched frantically at the railing of the bridge or hung to the bars with iron fingers were sent down again headlong by Fenton and the second officer at his side. From that moment officers and crew stood back to await the issue of as odd a duel as ever a ship's deck witnessed. Shoulder to shoulder, almost lips to lips, the two men wrestled and fought for life; their chests heaving, their bones bending, every muscle taut in that dread embrace. Not even Murray's giant strength freed him from the cat-like claws of this insane drunkard, who clung to him and would have dragged him down with a maniac's hand. In vain he crushed the figure to him until he could hear the bones crack; in vain he tried to release

his arms and grip the maniac by the throat. Keen held him like a dog, foamed his bitter execrations, wormed and grovelled in the desperation of that final throw; while the maddened crew at the ladder's foot raved impotently and even tried to strike at Murray over their captain's body.

"Fetch him down, Captain."

"Pull him round, Skipper, and let me knife him. Use your knees."

"Throw him down to us, Captain; we're ready enough."

And then altogether they roared, "Throw him down!" And a great negro, drawing a knife from his sheath, passed under the ladder unobserved and began to pull himself up beneath the captain's very feet. Neither Fenton nor Murray discovered this new danger; but Jessie, at the cabin door, wild with fear and silent until that time in her black disbelief that these things could be, caught sight of the face as it rose above the highest rung, and her sharp scream drew Murray's attention. He, too, saw the danger now, and as the negro gained the bridge and lifted his knife to strike he swung the captain's body in his arms, and the blade buried itself to the hilt in the soft flesh his fingers were gripping. In the same moment, and before anyone could move a hand against him, he struck the nigger full in the face with the butt end of his revolver, and the man raised his arms with a low moan and fell back insensible to the deck below.

The swift stratagem, unexpected and wholly successful, deprived the crew for an instant of any cer-

tain idea, and left them still and gaping. While some below shouted to those above to go up and have done with it, the men on the topmost rungs became suddenly aware that they were looking down the barrel of a pistol; and drawing back from that with warning cries, they turned presently upon their fellows, and altogether in the darkness went roaring and fighting upon the deck like a very pack of maddened wolves. Never was sweeter music heard by those upon the bridge than this fierce outburst of beast-like sounds, now ferocious, now snarling, now loud in the agony of wounds; and to it was added presently the harmony of revolver-shots and the commanding voice of Fenton, as he stood by the binnacle and tried to resume his old authority over them.

"Drop those knives!" he roared. "You nigger there, drop it, I say. Every man to his place. Sharp's the word—I'm coming down among you."

He sent a bullet skimming over their heads, and this, chancing to strike a cowl, rung from it a bell-like note, which drove every man, as at a signal, plump down upon the deck. There they lay, hidden by the shadows, nigger and Chinaman, German and Swede, side by side in that sudden truce of fear and recollection. The captain was dead—they knew it now; and beginning to perceive that Fenton would take up the command against them, they fell into this sullen silence as of men robbed suddenly of their resolution.

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In the chart-room, meanwhile, Murray, black with



"HE, TOO, SAW THE DANGER NOW"

powder and bearing twenty wounds, sat exhausted on the bunk and permitted Jessie to do with him what she would. He was talking a little wildly again, and she knew that the night had unnerved him.

"It's just nothing at all. Why are you so persistent, Jessie? Yes, that fellow had claws like a cat, the murdering little hound, but I don't think he's hurt me. Don't you go to the door—I won't allow it. Well, if you will coddle me, I suppose I must submit. Wasn't it lucky that Fenton heard them coming? Another ten seconds and we should have had peas in our soup. No; they won't try again—not to-night, anyway. The captain's dead, you see. Yes, it's a little painful, but not much."

She had bared his arm by this time and cut away the linen above the elbow. No wild animal could have left uglier wounds than the dead man had inflicted upon him, and while every touch of her gentle fingers gave him exquisite pain he did not flinch or withdraw his arm.

"You are a splendid nurse, Jessie," he kept on saying. "If ever you want a career, there's one for you. Why, you are born to it—oh! that's sharp—you have a touch like velvet and the fingers of a child. When you want a testimonial, come to me. What! Cutting up the table-cloth? Well, that's an idea, anyway."

Jessie, on her part, scarcely spoke a word. She was sick with fear, but the woman's will pushed fear aside, and every word she spoke was one of pity.

"Oh, my dear Murray! Oh, if I only had some

linen! What shall I do? Now, please—it must be painful—it must be dreadful! Oh, I am so clumsy! Please try to bear it.”

She used to say afterwards that but for Murray’s hurt she would not have lived through the night. It had all been so sudden, such a revelation to her of things not understood, that even now she had but the vaguest touch with reality; and there was no instant when the scene she had witnessed permitted her to forget it or to say that it could not be reacted. The horrid faces, the gleaming knives, were before her while she worked; she heard again the report of pistols and the shivering of broken glass; and her eyes turned constantly to the cabin door as though to see again the figure of the shadows.

Fenton came into the cabin while the bandages were being tied, and hesitating no longer to speak before Jessie, he frankly told them what he thought of it.

“They’re cowed for the minute, but it won’t be for long,” he said. “What’s to come of it God knows, Mr. West. Here we are, three against twenty-seven, and two hundred miles from any port. I tell you I was never in a tighter place in all my life, and I’d give something if anyone would show me the way out.”

“Begin by offering me a glass of water, Fenton. I’m as thirsty as a camel.”

Fenton and Jessie brought the water together, and when Murray had drunk it he asked a question.

“Is Kelly with us, then?”

"At present, certainly; you can trust him about two minutes."

"Perhaps—I'll have a talk to him. He doesn't want to hang, I suppose? Are there any others you can count upon?"

"Old Joe the carpenter may come in, and Watson the boy; the engineers go neutral—they're keeping below."

"The best place for them. So we're five against twenty-five—that's better. We must watch and watch about, Fenton. I'll take first, if you like. The fresh air will do me good—I certainly want it."

Jessie exchanged quick glances with Fenton, and then surprised them both by chiming in.

"Mr. Fenton," she said, "I want you to think I'm a man."

"I wish I could, miss."

"But you must to-night. Mr. West shall sleep, and you're as tired as he is. Now I shall stand at the cabin door for just two hours. Can't a woman scream if she tries? Well, I can, and I shall if I see anyone."

They laughed at her, protesting that it was impossible; but Jessie persisted obstinately, and, utterly routed, at last the two men made a pretence of going to their bunks and lying down while Jessie went out on the bridge and took up her stand by the binnacle. Kelly, the second officer, watched her with an admiration he did not attempt to conceal.

"Say," he asked, "are you an Amurrican girl?"

"Why, yes; I believe I'm that, Mr. Kelly."

"Wish I'd known it. You may count on me thick

and thin, Miss Golding. I thought you were a Britisher."

"Well, I'm not, so you can change your opinion. Where are the men? What are they doing now?"

"Waking old Tod Keen, I reckon. Your friend settled the skipper, you know. He must have legs like steel laths the way he lifted old Keen up; just held him like a fire-screen while the nigger slashed him. He's a good chum. I'm on your side now, down to my heels."

"Do you think they will attack us again?"

"Not to-night, that's certain. What they'll do to-morrow the Lord only knows; but I wouldn't give you ten cents for my chance, anyway. Of course, your friend may see us through; he's the very devil, isn't he?"

He went chattering on, pleased enough to find a pretty girl at his side, and asking himself what would happen to her if the men got the upper hand. Kelly had led a wild scamp's life, but something of an American's reverence for women remained to him; and, although Jessie knew it not, her chance talk with him that night was to mean much in the hours before them. Kelly, indeed, followed her like a dog, and when the watch was changed and he turned in he thought of her still.

We say that the watch was changed, and this, surely, was the strangest event of a night of events—that when at eight bells Kelly summoned the watch from below, the men lurched up and took their stations as though nothing had happened. True, there

were still dark patches upon the deck to mark the fracas ; but the bodies of the dead were in the sea behind them, and all the stillness of the night, the cloudless sky, the cold waning moon, seemed to say, "Impossible—impossible that these things have been."

Nor when the dawn came had the picture lost any of its weird delusions. Not a man aboard the *Royal Scot* discussed the tragedy in any word above a whisper ; and while Fenton, as impassive as ever, paced the bridge, and the dour Scotch engineer smoked a pipe by the engine-room skylight, the crew stood sullen and watchful as those who knew that a reckoning must come, but did not believe it would be yet.

Murray rarely closed his eyes that night, and the sun had not been an hour above the eastern horizon when he started up from a fitful doze and discovered Jessie in the armchair by his bunk. Her pretence that she was sleeping was as pretty as it was disingenuous, and directly Murray sat up she opened her great eyes and tried to look as little guilty as might be. He, on his part, was weary and ill prepared for activities ; but his mental perceptions were clearer for the sunshine, and his anxiety for their future would not let him rest.

"Come," he said ; "this is absolute nonsense. What is Fenton doing to let you be here?"

"Mr. Fenton, I believe, is on the bridge. Shall I call him down to send me away?"

Murray sank back upon his pillow and regarded her with that kindly tenderness which no manner of his could quite conceal.

"How long have you been here, Jessie? When did you come down?"

"When the watch changed. They didn't seem to want me out there—at least, they weren't polite enough to say so. I hope you are better, Murray; I only waited to ask you that."

"Thank you; much better. My convalescence will be complete when I hear that you are in bed. It was very foolish of you, Jessie, but very kind. Don't think that I am insensible or unfeeling; I'm not that at all. I just want to do the best for us all, and your best at present is bed."

"Let me dress your arm again, and I will go, Murray."

"That's a bargain—I'll give you ten minutes, Jessie. Tell Fenton that I shall be with him directly. He's a good fellow is Fenton, just the silent, honest seaman whose like you may find on any ship, whatever ruffians she carries. If there hadn't been a splendid Providence watching over you and me, we should have missed Fenton. But that's our luck—the luck which is going to take us right through to England, Jessie. You believe in our luck, don't you? I do, anyway, for something has told me all along that I should bring you through, and I shall do it too. Fastry will have to put up a tablet to me at Monkton Castle. I deserve that, and you can design it—an ethereal figure with one foot on a ship's deck and two angels for the corners. You'll see that I have my tablet, Jessie—you won't deny me that?"

Jessie's face clouded while he spoke, and she had no

heart to respond to his jest. He saw plainly that he had wounded her, and he passed swiftly to the old topic.

"I must speak to Fenton about the men. If we can keep them quiet for a few hours, the thing's done. It was a dreadful scene, Jessie, and of course there will be an inquiry when we get ashore. We must try to shield the men as much as possible, and let that madman bear the brunt. I'm glad he didn't die by my hand; it's something to remember that one of his own killed him. But I want you to forget it all if you can, and to leave the matter to Fenton and myself. We have both some wits to call our own, and we ought to be equal to it. I don't think you've anything really to fear, though I cannot keep it from you that there might be danger. If the worst comes to the worst — But I'm going to look for the best, and to say that I have been helped by the bravest little girl in America. You won't forbid me to say that, Jessie?"

"It would be quite untrue, Murray. I am not brave at all; bravery is something altogether different. I was just frightened out of my life, and that's the truth; but I hadn't time to tell you so. It's been the same ever since we left the *Jersey City*. I don't think I shall ever realise that you and I lived through that night, and I'm sure that I don't know even now what happened yesterday. My mind is all a blank; I seem changed into someone else, and I do believe the real Jessie Golding is still on the steamer going to London to be married. I can't even ask myself if our friends are alive; I dare not do it. I want to wake up and tell

myself that it isn't true, that I've dreamed it, and that I am in my old cabin and am going up to the promenade deck to find my aunt and Mr. Trew and the others. Do you think they were saved, Murray—now, do you really believe that?"

"I don't know, Jessie. I have hardly the right to speak of it. Many perished; we know that—we saw them for ourselves; but that isn't to say that a large number was not saved, and I feel sure your aunt was in one of the boats. The men had a poor chance, and I am asking myself a dozen times a day if my friend Laidlaw did well or badly. Poor chap! He'll miss me altogether. Do you know that Laidlaw is the weakest man I ever saw, and yet I like him? It's impossible to tell myself why; in a man's case, perhaps, more difficult than in a woman's. We know why we love a woman—something in her compels us; but in a man's case it is pure volition, often an aberration of the affections which is as incomprehensible as it is illogical. I liked Laidlaw, though I can't tell you why. I would give a thousand pounds to hear that he was alive."

Jessie did not think less well of him for this affection for his friend, though in her own heart she was asking herself if his estimate of the difficulties was true, and if love for woman was so easy of understanding as he would have it to be. Perhaps his great secret was not wholly hidden from her; but a certain pride forbade her to ask if that were so. Never once in the course of those perilous days had he spoken a word which a man might not address to the veriest

stranger, nor in the gentleness of his mood, his devotion, and self-sacrifice betrayed the deeper motive which kept him at her side. Untaught by him, if she knew the truth it was because her womanly instinct understood of this very self-control, the ardent passion with which it strove; the desire to leave her free and unfettered, the honourable truce which sealed his lips and would remain unbroken until she were again beyond the claims of his opportunities, the mistress of her own destiny and of his. And if such a code of honour pleased it also piqued her vanity, and led her sometimes to say that she would provoke his declaration. Alone with him in this intimate comradeship, all would have been made so easy if Murray had but said, "I love you." But those were the words that remained unspoken; and there were hours when Jessie believed that they would remain unspoken to the end.

Yet whether this silence would minister ultimately to her happiness or leave her the fretting child of an elusive desire she knew not in that dark hour of her destinies, nor cared to ask until the curtain of doubt should be lifted and she should see the day beyond.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SUMMONS

IT has been remarked by a sapient if ancient mariner that sailors are much like sheep, inso-much as they will go through any gap of folly which circumstance offers without so much as asking why or where, or even caring at all if the road led to the abattoir; while if no gap be available, they are equally content to chew the cud in the first sheltered place they come to, and to abandon a nomadic future in the face of a satisfying and abundant present. So it befell on board the *Royal Scot*, where the hands gathered about the dinner-table in the fo'castle at one bell on the day following the tragedy, and discussed yesterday's events with as little concern as they would have devoted to a fat lady at a fair or the latest performance of a well-known pugilist. They had followed Captain Keen to the bridge last night because it was an obvious thing to do, and they had quitted the bridge for a reason no less satisfactory; but now that facts were facts and the daylight sobered them, and Fenton the silent took the watch, they were just sheep again, browsing in a comfortable meadow, and quite incapable of judgments either shrewd or helpful.

Three men took a leading part in this futile discussion, and one of them was a German. To him old Joe the carpenter, Bath the quartermaster, Watson the boy, and a miscellaneous audience of Swedes, Teutons, and the riff-raff of docks listened with bated breath. The point to be decided was an ominous one, no less than the question whether Fenton should be permitted to walk the bridge as he was doing, or be immediately knocked upon the head and sent to join their late lamented skipper. This question was quite too much for the crew of the *Royal Scot*.

"Vell," the German was saying, "he look at you so, mit his eye, and you run away like little shildren. Vat for? Is he so big, so large? I say dot he is not. You are all tamn cowards, and at Caracas you shall hang—every man upon a goot rope."

Old Joe shook his head and cut himself an enormous quid of tobacco, while he admitted the accusation.

"That's so," he agreed, "and a precious big fool I was to sign on at all. I ought to be past nigger ships at my time of life. Yet I am with all the rest of you, and where shall I be to-morrow? Who can tell me that now? I'd give a precious big chunk of 'bacca to know summat—indeed I would, though that ain't to say as it matters much, good rope or bad."

"Well," said Bath the quartermaster, "you keep the 'bacca in your box and you'll be a wiser man. The fact is, mates, Captain Keen was a bad egg, and there's no use in saying he wasn't. I'm not one to cry on against a man taking a glass to drink—the Lord

knows we all want it sometimes; but I do say this, when drink comes near knocking out a cook's brains with his own saucepan, it's time something was done. That man didn't do well by you and me, mates; the papers I've got prove he didn't. He spoke fair words enough, but they were lies all along, and you know they were. Why, what was it to be? Just a pleasure party out and home, and the guns to be handed over nice and quiet at Caracas, and all of us to earn enough to buy grog-shops when the trip was done. Well, I'd sell my grog-shop cheap this day, sure and certain I would."

He filled his pipe and lit it angrily. Watson, the boy, was telling a Chinaman, with much picturesque detail, exactly how the captain died.

"I saw the knife do it," the lad said, "and he went 'ouch—ouch!' just like that and then he scratched the boards with his fingers and drew his legs up. He walloped me yesterday, so I didn't care. He was always wallopin' me; I'm black and blue right down to my shins."

"And so you deserve to be," said old Joe, reprovingly. "What's boys like you got to do with it? You run off and see if Mr. Fenton wants you. Perhaps you might hear what they're a-saying up there. I'll give you sixpence if you tell us anything, lad."

Bath, the quartermaster, thought that this offer savoured of riotous extravagance, and the German heard it with right-down contempt.

"To hell with your sickspenze!" he said amiably. "Run up the Sherman flag and make yourself safe at

Caracas. Sheneral Matos vill pay the pill. Vy not? It is kommon zenze."

"That be ——" said Bath, the quartermaster. "We're into the hole, and German flags aren't going to pull us out. I'll tell you what, though, Fenton's the man who could see us through if he had the mind to, and I've got to learn what keeps us back from him. Here we are, all in the wrong boat together, and Fenton no better off than the rest of us. Who's going to save his neck, I ask you? It ain't German flags, surely. No, nor Chinie flags, neither. We're took, fair and square, mates, and precious bad at that."

Old Joe remarked that any war ship—English, American, or German—would probably blow them to Kruger and back just by way of a holiday jaunt; and thereafter the conversation became desultory and singularly characteristic of a seaman's inability to realise the nature of the tragedy or its relation to his own life. Here they were, mutineers upon a quasi-pirate, a ship bearing arms to the rebels of Venezuela, liable to be shot or hanged or drowned as the occasion might dictate; yet give them a full pipe, a mug of coffee, and a mess of soup, and to-morrow did not exist for them. When Watson the boy came down from the chart-room and added his dish of gossip, they listened at first with phlegmatic interest, and were not aroused until the imminence of the danger became apparent to them.

"You hand over that sixpence," said the boy to old Joe, with a leer of triumph. "Here's Mr. Fenton a-

telling him as you're all dead and buried, and no mistake neither."

"You don't mean that," cried old Joe, surprised in spite of himself.

"I do indeed; you're to swing at Port of Spain. Them as is lucky will rot in irons—that's what the black 'un says. You're a flock of silly sheep, and they ain't afraid of you no longer."

"Oh, ain't they?"—said old Joe, crestfallen but disbelieving. "Well, look here, youngster; seeing as I've got to swing, anyway, suppose as I begins by a-trying the rope on your back. You darned little liar, what do you mean by it?"

Watson leaped nimbly to the companion in the face of this dire threat, and from the vantage ground of the second step he continued with infantine simplicity to cheer and enlighten them.

"Don't you go calling me a liar, 'cause I ain't, Mr. Joseph. You're a-going to die, and you'd better be preparing yourself. Here's the English gentleman saying that he'd whip you all with a birch broom. Why don't you think of your latter end? That's what the English gentleman says. You ought to know better than call honest boys 'liars' at your time of life. Now, don't you touch me, or I'll holler."

They did not touch him, fearing his yells would bring Fenton down upon them; but they all sat drawing heavily at their pipes and wondering by what means they might bribe him to a full and free confession.

"I'll give you my coffee if you'll behave yourself, Watson."

"Don't want it; they give me real coffee upstairs. Yours ain't decent grounds."

"You shall clean my vatch," said the German in a surprising burst of generosity.

"It's stopped already. What's the good of that, Kruger?"

"I'll tell you what, lad," chimed in Bath, the quartermaster, "you tell us what they really did say, and I'll give you my old pistol with the two barrels."

Evidently Watson was tempted; he sucked his finger thoroughly and descended a step.

"I can still holler here," he observed cautiously.

"Don't you be afeared. Speak right up, and that pistol's yours. I've got it in my chest, lad; you shall see it in a moment."

Watson came down another step and waited until the rusty barrels of the ancient weapon were at length displayed to his covetous gaze. Unable to withdraw his eyes from the contemplation of such a treasure, he came step by step to the table and began to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

"He ain't going to put into Charleston, 'cause he don't mean to risk anything now. He'll sell this old ship to General Matos and save his skin. The English gentleman and the lady with him—she says she ain't his wife, but I know different—they're all for striking the flag to this gunboat that's after us, 'cause they say, being English, they don't care; but Mr. Fenton

he's afeard of 'em and he's running for it. You can hear the engines for yourselves."

He wound up the harangue by making a grab at the pistol and bolting upstairs. The tidings he had carried were so little welcome, yet so obviously true, that every man in the fo'castle sprang to his feet and began to gird up his belt as though the answer must be his and his alone. The German spoke first, but excitement made him incoherent. Old Joe took it up with more restraint, but with an apprehension not less apparent.

"It's true, by the Lord! We're running fourteen knots, mates, and that's the best this ship can do. What's it mean now? What's he a-doing of?"

"It means," said Bath quietly, "that we're all dead men if he strikes."

"Then you shall not strike, you tamn poltroons! You shall kill him first before! Up mit you—up to the bridge! You haf the rope round about your necks, and vat you stand gaping stare for? Up mit you, I zay!"

They obeyed him without a word, and headlong like sheep, they swarmed up the companion and came out upon the deck. One swift survey of the sun-gold sea, of the anxious faces upon the bridge, of the funnel belching volumes of smoke, but above all of a distant object upon the starboard horizon—the squat masts, the unmistakable shape of a war-boat, told them the whole of the story, and answered all but one of the questions. What was the cruiser which pursued them? What flag did she fly? Upon what errand did she

steam? They were soon to learn. Fenton's clear voice, raised in all the confidence of authority, brought them to reason instantly, and found them a gaping crowd at the ladder's foot.

"Steady, there!" the order went. "Do you want lead for dinner? Yes, you may look at it. Stare away—glut your sight. Yonder's the Venezuelan gunboat *Curaçoa*. Her commander will hang you to the last man if he catches you. Is that what you came up to hear? Good news, my lads, isn't it? Shall we strike or run? I'll take my orders, if you'll please to name them."

They did not answer him. Some of them lurched to the bulwarks and stared at the cruiser with stupid eyes; others stuck their hands in their pockets and regarded Fenton with that silent hostility which a word or a look might have made active. Up above, upon the bridge, three waited, with beating hearts and nerves high strung, for that last declaration which must mean life or death to them. Would the men risk all in one desperate throw for the command and the ship? There were but four against them and one woman; and for long minutes together the fate of the brave men and the brave girl with them hung in the balance. Was it "yes" or "no"? Murray scanned the frowning faces as for a message which must mean all to him; but they told him nothing. A straw would have turned the balance. Old Joe, the carpenter, spoke at last, and his words were like a douche upon that heated company.

"I'll tell you what, mates," he said quietly. "You

do as you please; but since I can't run this ship myself, I'm a-going to leave Mr. Fenton where he is."

Someone cried out that Joe was always an officer's man, and the German had already drawn his knife and taken two steps towards the ladder when the loud report of a pistol was heard, and there stood Watson the boy with a smoking weapon in his hand, and his face as white as death.

"Please, I didn't," he stammered. "It worn't me, Mr. Fenton. The blime thing went off by itself. Oh! I do hope I ain't shot the German."

He had not shot the German—merely sent him flying of sheer fright into the scuppers. While the crew laughed uproariously, Murray dared to breathe. There was safety in laughter, he said—safety and time. The necessity for one was as great as for the other.

"Play up to it, Fenton," he whispered. "Say the engineers are with us. They'll take it from you—of course they will."

Fenton slipped to the railing of the bridge and held up his hand for silence.

"If you weren't blind, my men," he said, "you'd understand that I'm running this ship as fast as crazy engines can move her. Do you suppose we're any better off than you? Is General Matos going to be kind to the man whose arms are aboard to turn him out? I say he isn't. It's sink or swim together, and that should be plain to you. If you'll stand by me, I'll do what I can for you. If it's the other thing, come up here and tell me so, and the first man who sets his foot

on that ladder is as good as carrion. Why, what sort of a tenpenny rag doll do you take me for? Do you suppose I haven't figured it? Well, walk round to the chief engineer and ask him. Maybe you can row this ship if the engines stop. Oh, you're a clever lot, aren't you, and plenty of brains. Now, you go and think it over, for I've done with you, and I'm going to steam out of danger if I can. But I shan't do it if I waste my breath on a parcel of thick-headed fools, and I don't mean to try, either. Be off with you to your posts. It makes me sick to see you."

The men heard him without a word or a gesture, and when he had done with it and turned to Murray again, they gathered together and fell to discussing it with much whacking of palms and a nice insistence upon quite unnecessary points. Taught by long years of habit to obey the orders of the man upon the bridge, excitement and rage alone fortified them in resistance; and now that laughter had changed the current of the offensive idea, they reasoned with some shrewdness that the first and only object of the moment was to escape the ship which pursued them so steadily. There she was, plainly to be seen upon the post-quarter—an old-fashioned gunboat, with stumpy masts and an evil-looking funnel and a great loom of smoke drifting behind her like the devilish tail of some comet of the deep; and if she gained upon them her advantage was but scarcely perceptible, for the engines of the *Royal Scot* were shivering in their frames by this time, and her furnaces roared at a white heat. It would be a long chase, the men said;

and saying it, they took a full breath, and reminded each other that Fenton was the only clever officer among them, and that if he went under, the ship might as well go to glory at once. Elementary instincts of self-preservation signed the truce upon which they were now set as keenly as they had been upon murder ten minutes ago. They must keep Fenton upon the bridge—that idea possessed them to the exclusion of any other; and more willing seamen than they proved themselves to be for some hours to come never served the captain of a tramp. Nay, so far as civility went, luncheon was served in the saloon, and although two of the lunchers had loaded revolvers in their pockets, they might as well have carried pop-guns for any need there was of them.

"It will be London in twenty days, after all," Murray said to Jessie when they sat down. "The delay is bad, but it might have been worse. Fenton will tell you that we are coming out all right. Eh, Fenton— isn't it that? Come, man; don't be a pessimist."

"I'm not, sir. There's no room for pessimism on a tramp steamer, as you may judge for yourself. If you ask me a plain question, I will give you a plain answer. We shall sight the Windward Islands before that gunboat picks us up. That is my opinion. I may be wrong, but I stick to it."

"And if you don't sight them—if we are taken, Mr. Fenton, what then?" asked Jessie, who had told herself many times that the strain was wearing her out, but who confessed as much to none. "Is there any

Venezuelan ship that would harm a subject of the United States? I don't believe there is, whatever you tell me. They're frightened of us—everybody's frightened of us, and you know it's true."

Fenton would not have contradicted such confidence for the world. If British prejudice led him to doubt the exact value of American citizenship at such a crisis, he kept his own counsel, and went on quietly with his dinner.

"Of course, you are quite right," he said. "My old-fashioned notions don't get very far away from the bridge of my own ship, and that's a fact. If you are to reach London, Miss Golding, this is no time to fool around with government or any other ships. That is why I am making for a British port, even if it is not the port named in my bills. We might go further north, I grant you, and touch at Kingston, where you would get a ship at once; but I have my own reasons for not doing that. Some day I will tell you what they were. We old seamen, you know, are taught the value of holding our tongues. You will forgive me if I cannot say more."

She forgave him with a look, but neither she nor Murray would ever forget how much they owed to this simple-minded, honest seaman. His silence was itself a guarantee of their safety. There was not a man upon the *Royal Scot* who did not look to Fenton in doubt or difficulty.

"Of course she forgives you," said Murray, taking the defence upon himself. "What's she here for if it isn't to forgive us both? Look at this miserable

sinner, and observe the way he is consuming a particularly indigestible pudding. He knows that he is forgiven. If he were quite sure that you would make Port of Spain before an inquisitive gunboat, he would take another helping. It's got to be that, Fenton; we must out-steam the man, if we burn the beds. Why, you wouldn't have it said that a fifth-rate tramp is to be put before a daughter of America, who is going to St. George's to be married? Shame on the notion. All Lloyds would be against you."

He pushed his plate away from him, and Fenton immediately heaped another serving of the pudding upon it.

"I will answer you like that," said he. "If yonder tub cannot take fifteen knots, I am a Dutchman. If you sold up the country, sir, Venezuela could not buy a couple of battleships, and if she could buy them she could not handle them. They'll tell us just now how we are doing, but I have no doubts. We shall be in Port of Spain to-morrow night, and there's an end of it. You can get a steamer from there to Jamaica, and go home on one of the West Indian boats. If it takes you more than three weeks to make London, well, that is not my fault; but it doesn't seem to me that a day or two more or less is of much consequence just now."

Jessie said that it was of no consequence at all, and in such a tone of voice that Murray looked at her sharply, and reading deep in her eyes the meaning of her words, his usually pale face flushed a little, and he turned away uneasily.

"I agree," he said; "it is just of no consequence at

all. We joke about these things; but I think that we must all thank God in our hearts that we are alive to speak of them. When I write a book I shall perhaps be able to tell others what I cannot tell myself just yet. If you asked me, Fenton, I would say it was all a nightmare. I don't believe the *Jersey City* ever was built, or if she was built, she is not at the bottom of the sea. The rest is equally nebulous. There never was a raft, and the *Royal Scot* does not exist. Can you understand it?"

Fenton shook his head. He had been through too many perils by land and water that the perspective of this should be lost to him.

"I don't understand it at all," he said. "What about the young lady, for instance? Isn't she real?"

"Mr. West will not admit that," said Jessie quickly. "He is just too fond of the delusion. I am like an old leather trunk that you express on the railway. It is a relief to get rid of it, and to hand over the checks to someone else. He has been telling me so ever since he saved my life. It was 'London, London, London' all day on the raft; and he can't think of anything else even now. I'm sure he'll dance for joy when he sees me on another ship."

"You know that I don't dance," said Murray. "I leave that to your clerical friends. My personal joy will take the shape of a new suit of clothes and some clean collars. Do you remember, Fenton, bringing me an empty money-case the first day I was aboard? You said the contents had been stolen. Well, so they had, by a couple of sharpers on the *Jersey City*. I

put the notes there to be stolen; they represented about four hundred pounds in bad money. If a gentleman named Bertrand Sedgwick ever gets to England he will probably do seven years. My own money was in my belt; we shall want it at Port of Spain."

Murray related this little story as though it were a trifle to amuse them at the table, but his real purpose was to let Jessie know how they stood, and that he could help her to England when the moment came. She had never thought anything at all about the matter of money, and it was not until he broached it that she understood how dependent upon him she was at every step of this fateful pilgrimage.

"You think of everything, Mr. West," she exclaimed a little sadly. "Why, I was in such a fluster that I even left my jewelry behind; and as for money, who'd remember that when a ship's sinking? I shall have to cable to my father at Port of Spain, and tell him to come and fetch me. I can just think how glad he will be. Oh, yes, he will be glad."

The thought of others is rarely possible to us in the fret and rush of incident, nor may we charge selfishness against those who, finding their first obligation to themselves, are indifferent for the moment to the anxieties or even the tears of their kinsfolk. So swiftly had events moved since the terrible night when the *Jersey City* added one to the long roll of steamships doomed upon the high sea that any recollection of those at home—their sorrow and their suspense—had perforce been momentary and in some sense unreal. But now, when the clouds were lifting and a glimmer

of light beyond them might be seen, Jessie remembered, and in her remembrance there was both joy and sorrow.

Kelly, the second officer, had been upon the bridge during the luncheon hour, but he came down while they were still sitting at the table and reported an unwelcome fact.

"She's coming up, sir," he exclaimed a little abruptly. "I hope I'm wrong, but I should like you to see. There's more of her above the horizon than there was an hour ago. I think it must be the *Curaçoa*, as you said. They have only one gunboat of that shape, so it must be her. I wish you'd come up right now, Mr. Fenton, and tell me what you think."

All quitted the table abruptly at this ill news and followed him in haste to the bridge, where a single glance justified his alarm. There, on the starboard quarter, the gunboat was plainly to be seen, and while all the facts concerning her had been but a surmise heretofore, Fenton's splendid glass confirmed them before many minutes had passed. Even Murray's untrained eye could perceive how rapidly the strange ship gained upon them, while the dense volumes of smoke pouring from her funnel and the crescent of foam at her bows bore witness to the frantic exertions of her crew.

"She's gaining hand over foot," said Fenton quietly. "If she holds on like that eight bells to-night will strike our flag. I don't like it, Mr. West; I don't like it at all."

He fell to pacing the bridge like some caged animal which turns restlessly to and fro seeking a gate to the endless bars. They all understood how real was his fear, and the men below, clustered together in discontented groups, would glance from time to time at his impassive face as though to read the message of their fate. Would night save them, or by night must the end come? No man knew. The two ships rushed onward, one toward its haven, the other upon its prey. In a few hours the story would be told, the last page recorded. And while those aboard the *Royal Scot* prayed for night or a haven, the loud report of a gun and the loom of smoke sinking in the hollows of the seas answered the voices and delivered the summons.

CHAPTER XIV

PURSUIT

THE pursuit endured with varying fortune throughout the long afternoon. A fitful westerly wind, which had blown with some freshness in the forenoon watch, died away until it was not a cat's-paw at two bells; and from that moment the air seemed charged with some sulphurous heaviness, and the blue sky above was obliterated in a fine mist, unlike anything the men had seen. They would have welcomed a fog at this hour as some good gift of Fortune, but no fog fell; nor was the horizon obscured, and both ships remained visible, each to the other, like a black shape against a cold grey curtain. Whatever advantage had been gained by the *Curaçoa* in the morning hours she failed to make good as the day drew on; and while the distance between the two ships remained the same, there was no change which even a seaman might detect. From time to time, perhaps, as a supreme effort at the furnaces drove one or the other to abnormal speed, and the whole sea about became a dense cloud of suffocating smoke, there would be a momentary shifting of position which reanimated hope or baffled it; but in the main the battle was a drawn one, whose doubtful issue drove the crew of the *Royal Scot* to new frenzies

of labour and to new threats against those who would have saved them. No man aboard now but did not go willingly to the stoke-hole, and there take the place of the sinking firemen. Wierd forms, half-naked and covered from head to foot with black sweat, sent their long shovels and their rakes into the fiery eyes of the steaming boilers, and cared nothing for bell or watch or anything but their own safety. Words of encouragement, words of despair, spurred them to the task. They knew not precisely what they had to fear from the Venezuelan gunboat; but plain fact told them that they were dealing with a half barbarous nation—blockaders running a cargo of arms to a State which cared nothing for the law of nations, and much for the virtue of the rope. Rightly or wrongly, they believed that the commander of the *Curaçoa* would shoot or hang them on sight; and if these fears were ignorant and premature, they were none the less effective. Never since she was built had the *Royal Scot* plunged through the long Atlantic swells as she plunged that day, her steel plates shivering in the bolts, her masts trembling, her engines racing until the very beams threatened to be burnt away. And through it all the cry of gain and loss went up, the oaths, the threats of rogues who had not done a decent day's work in all their lives; but who now atoned in one short hour for the leisure of the past. Such as these fought to reach the engine-room ladder, fought with each other at the bunker's mouth, were fighting still as the coal was pitched into the gaping furnaces and the flames licked it up and the black smoke was belched forth. Night

must find them beyond the range of the warning guns. They believed that their lives were at stake.

Fenton never left the bridge during this fever of pursuit, nor did he communicate his own thoughts to anyone. From time to time, in answer to Jessie's staccato questions, he would say, "Oh, she'll do," or "It's well enough," or again, "I really cannot tell you." But more than this he would not say, and for the best of reasons, that any man on the ship was as well able to judge the situation as he. What breath he had for words he devoted to the engineers and those in the stoke-hole. Again and again he cried out for more steam, applauded their efforts, and sent new men to assist them, until they began to realise that he put no less a price upon successful flight than they did. Murray, in the chart-room, remarked every inflection of that usually cold voice, and he confessed to Jessie that he would sooner have seen the first officer silent than loquacious.

"Fenton's anxious," he said reflectively. "It's the first time I've seen him so since we were on the ship. Just look at the way he walks up and down—like a tiger in the Zoo, you might say, if it were not Fenton. I suppose he's got it in his head that a Venezuelan is another name for a cut-throat. I think he is wrong, but I don't tell him so. A navy is not a good training-ground for rogues—even a South American navy. The commander of that ship would probably treat us decently. It's only my surmise, of course, but I hold to it."

Jessie shook her head, and leaning far back in the

deck chair, which a susceptible steward had discovered among the treasures of the *Royal Scot*, she took Fenton's part.

"My father was once in Venezueland on a railway commission, Murray. He used to say that he would sooner have been in prison. All the women wanted to marry him, and all the men to shoot him. I think Mr. Fenton is quite right. We know what we are doing here, but that steamer's a lottery. Father declares that he would sooner go into a wild beast den than visit Caracas again. He does not like pistols, and he hates women. Mr. Fenton's the same, isn't he?"

"Oh, Fenton's a good fellow," Murray admitted willingly. "He has got his head screwed on the right way. No doubt he thinks it is for the best, and of course he has a valuable consignment on board—amongst other things, one young lady in a hurry to get married. You will have write the story of your engagement some day, Jessie, and dedicate it to me. 'Through fire and water to Hanover Square.' I venture to think you won't better the title. If there's anything to be said against it, it is on the side of your sex generally. You must not depreciate a good thing; a panic on the marriage market would be an irreparable disaster. I shall tell Fenton that he's the benefactor of women, and that you ought to invite him to your wedding. His picture would look well at Monkton—now wouldn't it?"

Jessie turned her head away and gazed through the window of the chart-room, wherefrom she could see the misty horizon and the black cloud which almost ob-

scured the outline of the pursuing ship. Murray's light talk hurt her ears to-day, and she was in no mood at all to respond to it. The sustained excitement of the earlier hours forbade her wholly to realise this hour and the issue it should decide. The vaguest ideas of past and present, and even of her own future, quelled excitement and left her almost indifferent. She was not angry with Murray, for she knew that he sought to distract her attention; but the knitted brows, the restless eyes, and the nervous twitching of his hands, denoted concealment. Every word that he spoke was punctuated by a glance of the pursuing ship. His heart quickened or beat more slowly as gain or loss was the message.

"If I go to Monkton Mr. Fenton certainly will be welcome there," Jessie said at length. "It's just that 'if' which is wearing my life out, Murray. Why am I not a magician? Why can't I read faces in the water? If you were clever, you would do it for me."

"Ah! if I were clever. If I were able to interest myself in anything beyond a rather exacting present; but I am not. A staunch belief in the evil of the day has made my life what it is. I simply don't want to know to-morrow; and if your crystal were there, I would not look in it. Surely uncertainty is the one great impulse of life. We don't know, and we live to find out. I am asking myself precisely at this moment if we are gaining or losing on that gunboat. Everything else is a matter of indifference, except a cigar—a good cigar. Do you mind my lighting it,

Jessie? So much that is unpleasant floats away in tobacco smoke."

"I wish that ship would float away!" exclaimed Jessie a little dolefully, and then, as though excitement returned as upon a freshet, she sat straight up and exclaimed:

"We shall know everything to-morrow, shan't we?"

Murray answered her very seriously:

"You will know to-night, Jessie, I promise you that—to-night."

She understood him. That night would answer her question once for all, giving her the best or the worst, as her destiny had written it. The flippant mood became her own thereafter, and she fell to chattering of a hundred everyday affairs; of her summer at Newport, and her last visit to Europe, of her father's house on Fifth Avenue, and why she liked Paris, and of her friends in England, and their anxieties; and in this Murray encouraged her, his eyes upon the horizon always, but his laughter no less light than hers, and his tenderness towards her unfailing.

At one bell in the first dog-watch the *Curaçoa* made one of those supreme efforts which she had shown fitfully during the day, and racing up at a great speed through the heavy mists, she presently fired a shell across the bows of the *Royal Scot*, and this went plunging into the sea with a hissing sound which drew many of Fenton's men to the bulwarks and sent others flat upon their faces. Murray in the chart-room, hearing the sound of firing, made an abrupt end of a

wild tale with which he had been trying to divert Jessie's attention, and running out upon the deck he was just in time to see a second shell plump into the water not a biscuit toss from the propeller of the ship.

"Good God, Fenton!" he cried. "Are they firing shell?"

"That's so, Mr. West."

"Then what are our fellows doing?"

"You can see for yourself. They are working like niggers."

"It's very sudden, Fenton."

"These things generally are, sir. I don't think a shell often trots."

He laughed ironically as a third shot struck the fo'castle hatch and filled the air with a cloud of splinters.

"Doesn't look like marbles, does it?" he went on grimly. "We'll have to strike in five minutes if this goes on."

"Then they'll come aboard here?"

"Yes; I fancy they'll do that."

"We must stop that, Fenton. If Miss Golding falls into their hands—— But we mustn't let her. What are the men doing? Why don't you send more of them into the stoke-hole? Can't you see how urgent it is?"

Fenton did not lose his temper; he understood the meaning of these incoherent questions, these child-like promptings, and he bore with them.

"They're head over heels together down there now.

What more can they do? No, Mr. West, we must sit tight and whistle. I think you should take Miss Golding to the saloon. They'll knock this band-box of a chart-room all to ribbons just now. She's better downstairs."

Jessie answered for herself, standing at the chart-room door, and plainly showing that she understood.

"Why, no, Mr. Fenton; she's not. Her place is right here, and she's not going to change it. Don't call me a coward, Murray; please don't call me that."

"Impossible; you are only rash. Well, have your own way. It's a dangerous way, Jessie—a very dangerous way."

"And yours?" she asked him. "Oh! do you think that I feel nothing for others, then? Have I a heart of stone, Murray?"

"I know that you have not," he said in a very low voice; and then he turned away, and would not look at her. But she stood so close to him that he could feel the whisper of her breath upon his cheek; and when the gun belched fire and smoke again, he took a step instinctively as though to shield her. In the excitement of the shot's flight their hands were interlocked; they waited for the end almost heart to heart.

The shell fell into the sea a cable's length behind them. So much had the *Royal Scot* gained in the lull of the pursuer's effort. The men on deck raised a hoarse cheer; it was echoed in the inferno where the scarlet figures plied their shovels and men were baking as meat upon a jack.

"Look at that!" cried Fenton, surprised for an in-

stant. "We shall best them yet, by heaven! Well done, my lads. There's grog for that—well done!"

He cried to the steward to serve rum in the engine-room—an order he would never have given but as a last desperate resource; and while the men were clamouring for it and the pannikins were clinking, yet, another shell just touched the combings of the main-deck hatch, and carrying iron and wood in its path, struck a negro full upon the legs above his knees and left him a maimed and bleeding hulk. None of those above saw the man, for the bridge-deck hid him from their view, and they were assuring themselves that no harm was done at the very moment when the negro's body rolled into the scuppers.

"A little premature, weren't you, Fenton?" Murray asked him, almost reproachfully. "You should have kept that grog, I'm thinking."

Fenton shrugged his shoulders and pointed to the enveloping mists all about them.

"I don't know what to believe, sir. This air deceives a man. Did you ever breathe anything like it? Burnt cinders and steam I call it—and in the Atlantic too. If there's much more of the same sort to come we'll both have to strike, I reckon. Just look ahead there; it's a mountain alight, I could swear, and yet I know it's only cloud. What's the *Curaçoa* going to make of that? Not much, you be sure."

It was certainly a remarkable phenomenon, and even the galling excitement of the chase were forgotten for an instant before that lurid spectacle. The

whole of the western heavens were now obscured by fantastic shapes fashioning themselves against the curtain of the zenith, and while the sun still shone low down upon the water, clearing itself a path as of gamboge and amber upon a blue-grey sea, the higher altitudes were dark with mighty cones of cloud, shifting and weird and wind-borne, so that their bulk was variable and quickly changing, and the light they gave or shut out akin to the gloom of twilight or the deeper darkness of the night. The air itself became heavy as the breath of fire, and a thin mist of the finest white dust began to fall upon the steamer—a mist not of sleet or snow, but unlike anything the men had seen, and so scorching to lungs and palate that those on the deck gasped and fought for breath, and the men in the engine-room came headlong up the ladder and swore they could do no more. It was such a sudden transformation, a *dénouement* at once so terrifying and full of surprise, that even the *Curaçoa* and her guns were forgotten, and altogether the men gaped at the veil upon the sky, and asked what, in God's name, it meant. They cared no longer now for shot or shell, or any prison which might await them; but one idea animated them—the fight for air and light and the water which would quench their intolerable thirst. Some at the casks, some hanging over the bulwarks that the salt foam might wet their lips, they gave way to that panic of fear with which the evidence of things unknown can inflict the ignorant; and believing that death was upon them, they turned their blasphemies upon the very man who had waged so

good a battle for their lives. Fenton, however, heard them with supreme indifference, and his first thought, was, as ever, for the weakest upon his ship.

"Take Miss Golding into that cabin, sir," he said to Murray, when he had breath to speak at all. "God knows what it is; I have never seen anything like it. If we don't get out of it in ten minutes, we are all dead men. Do you go inside and shut the windows. My throat's on fire—indeed it is."

He had already cried an order to put the ship about, and now they turned, and ran full south toward safety and the light. Side by side with them, racing for the open sea, went the *Curaçoa*; and these two, hard set in flight and pursuit not ten minutes ago, were henceforth as sister-ships upon a common purpose of salvation. For many minutes together you heard no sound upon the deck of the *Royal Scot* but the hard breathing of men in agony, and the groans of those that believed that they were dying. Even Fenton, standing like a figure of iron by the wheel, could not hide his distress; but he did not quit his post, and when Murray insisted upon standing at his side, he still had the voice to tell him of his folly.

"Miss Golding—think of her first, sir. You've no right here."

"Every right, Fenton; it's turn and turn about. Do you go in and breathe; I'm at the wheel."

"I can't do that, sir; my place is here. Did you ever see anything like it? The heaven's afire and raining dust. What do you think it is?"

"I know what it is, Fenton. It's a volcano—you

can tell that by the dust. One of the Windward group is active; I feel sure of it. We must keep away south, Fenton; I see light there."

"I'm doing it, sir. God help us all! Look at that!"

The remark escaped him as a small fire-and-aft schooner took shape in the mists and appeared to emerge from them and pass under their very poop. The ship had all her sails set, but they were aflame and burning in little jets of fire which gas might have fed; while her decks presented a spectacle from which they turned sick at heart and terrified. It was all so sudden that the fog enveloped the schooner before they could come to any resolution, and all trace of her had disappeared when next they looked.

"Did you see that, Fenton? A poor devil there was burning from head to foot."

"I saw it, Mr. West. It may be our turn next. My lungs are like hot coal. Can you see any light anywhere?"

"It's clearer a little west of south. Bear up, Fenton; we'll see each other through."

"Oh, yes; we'll do that. Can you take the wheel a minute? That fellow's going blind, I think."

"I'll try, Fenton; it isn't the first time I've steered a steamship. Pray God it won't be the last."

Silence fell for a little while, and a hush upon the ship seemed to emphasise the intensity of the crisis. In the wheel-house Murray was sheltered somewhat from the intolerable scorching dust; and if he pitied the quartermaster who lay half-dead at his feet, he

might not even stretch out a hand to save him. Yonder over the seas shone the still pool of golden light, wherein all might be won and the reward be reaped. He saw that this was the supreme hour of his manhood, when every nerve, every muscle, brain and body alike, must wage the grim fight for the life of the woman he loved; and so resolving, he tried to put the thought of physical pain from him, and he shut his teeth, and in his heart said, "It shall be." In the stress of this resolve the minutes passed—intolerable minutes, when all things swam before his eyes and his tongue could utter no word, and his eyes were half-blinded, and still he stood and wondered that reason remained to him.

For a woman's name was his staff, and her image was before him; and when he fell at last, insensible, upon the body of the brave man at his feet, he believed that this was death for her and for him.

CHAPTER XV

TWO INTERVIEWS

UPON a morning of July some two months after the good ship *Royal Scot* had raced side by side with the Venezuelan gunboat *Curaçoa*, and the burning dust from Mount Pelée had decided the issue of the flight, a smart reporter entered the hall of the Palace Hotel at Liverpool and asked the clerk whether Mr. Murray West was up.

"From the *Liverpool Standard*," he said, "and I won't keep him a minute. Just take my card up and say I can wait."

The clerk, turning over the card with interest, and having surmised that the Englishman in question had recently arrived upon the boat from Kingston in the company of a young American lady, sent a servant upstairs while the reporter solaced himself with a cigarette and a supercilious glance at the other occupants of the hall. Possibly he examined them with an eye to the process, for the interviewing habit had grown upon him, and there was little on the earth below or in the heaven above that he rated from any other standpoint than that of his notebook. He was still engaged in that business-like survey when the porter returned and invited him upstairs.

"He'll see you," said the man, "if you are sharp. He's a rum 'un, I tell you; makes me skip when he looks at me."

"Ah!" said the reporter with an immense sense of the superiorities of knowledge. "He has been used to driving niggers, you know."

He found his victim in a small sitting-room upon the first floor. Murray wore a smoking-suit purchased last night in Liverpool, and his breakfast of tea and toast was untouched on the table before him. A litter of telegrams upon his knee spoke of discovery and greeting, while a box of cigarettes at his right hand confessed a smoker's contemplation. One letter, however, addressed to Lord Woodridge, he snatched up hastily when the reporter entered, and thrusting it into his pocket he bade the young man take a chair.

"Mr. Murray West, I believe."

"Yes, that's so. What's your business?"

"I am from the local *Standard*. If you would be so good as to answer a few questions——"

"Ha!" said Murray with a gesture. "You wish me to think that I am still in America?"

"Oh, no, sir; really not. We don't want anything private—nothing low or vulgar. It is about the *Jersey City*. I have been given to understand that you were on board her, and we thought that a few particulars would be most interesting to your many admirers."

"Admirers? Great heavens, man, don't be an ass. You probably know more about the *Jersey City* than

I do; yes, I am sure you do. Suppose we reverse the process. I will interview you for a change."

He pushed the cigarettes across the table and laid his fingers upon the button of a bell near by.

"Is it whiskey or brandy? I find the press monotonous in the matter of its beverages."

The reporter was greatly shocked.

"I am a teetotaler," he said, with a condemnatory wave of a far from clean hand. "I put down much of my success to that."

"Excellent. Go on as you are doing, and some day you will bag an Archbishop. You can tell me, to begin with, something about the *Jersey City*. They had no news of her when I was at Kingston, and naturally we got none coming across. These telegrams may tell me what I want to find out, but you can anticipate them. How many were drowned that night? I don't even know that yet."

The reporter lit a second cigarette and showed his appreciation of the opportunity by a long narration of which we shall venture to omit all that does not concern our narrative.

"You were sunk by a tramp collier from Cardiff," he began. "She stood by you in the fog, and her boats picked up ninety-two of your people. There were sixty women saved in the lifeboats, and they all got on the tramp before morning. One way and the other, and as far as we can learn, very nearly two hundred were saved out of the seven hundred passengers she appears to have had on board. Everyone admits that the captain of the *Idris*—that was the tramp's

name—did his best. He says he came right on to you amidships in the fog, and he didn't know for nearly an hour whether he could keep his own steamer afloat. It was a very dreadful business. Nearly all the poor folk in the steerage seem to have been drowned, and there were twenty young ladies from the Casino Company in New York, of whom only one was saved. You know, of course, that Miss Golding's relative was in the first boat that was picked up. I understand she has remained in America."

"This telegram says so," said Murray, holding up one of the many pink forms. "Do you happen to know if Mr. Golding Senior has remained in London?"

"I don't know, sir. They said he was terribly cut up, and unable to leave his hotel for some weeks. No one here believed that there could be any other survivors. It was a clever idea of yours, I must say. 'Pon my word, I should never have thought of it."

Murray looked at him and admitted that he would not. But he was far too polite to voice such sentiments.

"Do you know if the Rev. St. John Trew, the vicar of Sackville Street, was saved?" he asked next.

"Oh, yes, he was. The parson came up like Noah out of the Ark—six hours hanging to an oar, they say. You can't get into his church since he came back."

"Blessed are the uses of advertisement. I could imagine that Noah might have been a fine subject for an interview, with headlines, and the private opinions of Ham upon the discoveries of the voyage. That, unfortunately, is lost to posterity, but I am glad that

the reverend gentleman is alive. You can't tell me the same of Captain Ross, I am sure?"

"No, sir; he went down with his ship."

"Ah! he would do that. The old story, of course. Down with his ship. Do you wonder that we like to sail with British seamen?"

"I do not, sir. I always sail with them when I go for my holiday."

As the young gentleman's holiday was usually an unexciting trip to Blackpool, the admission did not stand for as much as it might have done. Murray's politeness, however, construed it in a larger sense.

"Ah! you are a traveler, then?" he asked. "Have you ever visited Martinique?"

"No, I have not; and I will take precious good care I don't, either. Why, your trouble was child's play to theirs. Forty thousand people killed in a few months. I am for England, thank you."

"You are a wise man. I owe something to Martinique, nevertheless. Has anyone told you that Miss Golding and I were saved by Martinique?"

"Yes, sir; a telegram from Kingston said that."

"Then you know that we should have been knocked to splinters but for the dust cloud from Mount Pelée. We ran into it with the Venezuelan gunboat *Curaçoa* at our heels. The men went down like flies. Ten of them died within an hour, and amongst them one of the best seamen that ever trod a deck—Jack Fenton by name. I was in the wheel-house, and I owe my life to the fact. When I recovered consciousness, after two hours face downwards on the floor, I found my-

self on board an American battleship. Such things it is difficult to talk about; but if you want a picture for your paper your artist has a great opportunity. Tell him that a big steamer ran a mad race without pilot or helmsman until her fires died down and the boilers gave out, and that there was not a man aboard her capable of lifting a hand to alter her course or close her throttle. That's something new in phantom ships, isn't it? There we were, lying in heaps about the deck, and the engines throbbed and the foam flew, and that steel hulk, unguided, unattended, raced us out to safety. You want an Edgar Allan Poe or a Marryatt to tell that as it should be told. I am far too practical, and my imagination concerns itself for the moment with the somewhat pleasant fact that I am alive."

"Indeed, we thought you were dead, sir, and that's the general opinion."

"I am delighted to hear it. Please leave my name out of anything you may write and record this as an impersonal story."

"I shall be careful to do so. Is nothing to be said about Miss Golding, sir?"

"Absolutely nothing—I can give you no authorisation."

"She is to marry Lord Easry, I believe? They say at once."

"Really, I cannot discuss a young lady's private affairs."

"But I may tell them how she was saved from the *Royal Scot*?"

"Oh, certainly. She was in the chart-room; I

closed the windows myself and bolted them. She did not know what we were doing, and when she discovered the truth the danger was past. The American commander struck a ship full of apparently dead men and a woman trying to steer it. I don't think that anything you could say of Miss Golding's courage would be an exaggeration. It has been her lot to obtain an experience rare in the life of any woman, and she has behaved nobly. I can say no more; the story is there to speak for itself."

"And you, sir—have you any plans?"

"Plans? What do you mean by plans?"

"Well, I mean—that is—do you know what you are going to do now?"

"My dear sir, does any man with ideas know what he is going to do now?"

"Yes, sir, but about the future."

"Oh, the future. Well, I am going to lunch at one o'clock and to take the afternoon train to London. Permit me to wish you 'good morning'—and, thank you, I shall not want a copy of your paper."

The young man gathered his papers together with nervous haste and bowed himself out of the room as quickly as he could. In the hall below he confessed to the porter that he would sooner have entered a lion's den.

"You are right," he said; "he looks into your chest and out at your back. I shan't feel safe until I am back in my office."

Murray waited until there was no possibility of the interviewer returning, and then once more read the

letter which he had covered with his hand when the young man intruded. Truth to tell, this was the first time since Albert Bentham had come over to America to tell him of his changing fortunes that he had quite realised the new position he must occupy henceforth in England and the meaning of the title which the accidents of birth and death had made his. Seven months ago his uncle, the Earl of Woodridge, had died very suddenly at the old Abbey house in Suffolk; and while two sons stood between Murray and the earldom when he went to America to seek his fortunes and to forget, the Natal campaign contrived this singular *volte-face* and made him the new earl. In so far as it terminated his immediate difficulties and gave him the right once more to stand *pari inter paribus*, he was grateful to Fortune and her whims; but he did not believe himself to be possessed of those somewhat commonplace qualities which are necessary to a peerage, and democratic America had taught him a good contempt for those empty sounds which would catalogue the whole order of men and pronounce these the socially elect and those the socially damned. He would not admit that he could ever hear himself called "Lord Woodridge" without a sense of the ridiculous and the unfit. His tastes, his ways of thought, his hard life, had robbed him of the primitive British respect for classes; and there was no article of his faith which endowed him with the smallest reverence for state or condition. Nevertheless, he understood that he must pay some penalty to riches, and there was enough of the born aristocrat in him to prevent any

false step which would have been a scandal to his fellows. Indeed, nature had gifted him with many true traits of a nobility not always found among nobles; and this inborn grace and dignity of manner were not a little responsible for his unfailing influence with women.

He dressed hastily, we say, and with a preoccupation which was but one of the many witnesses to mental unrest and very real anxieties. Destiny had set him at last side by side upon an English shore with the woman he loved; and the first act he contemplated was separation, complete and final, from the gentle companion of his misfortunes. Two reasons, each uncontrovertible in his opinion, were the justification of a course so difficult and in some ways so inexplicable. Jessie, he said, was not a free agent, nor was England likely to make her one. The betrothed of another, he, Murray, would sooner have cut off his right hand than have asked her to be his wife; but even had there been no engagement, and the name of Gerald Baron Eastray erased from the peerage, he would still have kept silent and let her go. The suspicion which rogues had cast upon him must remain to blight his life and to seal his lips. He knew that he would be unwise among fools to marry Jessie until he could go to her and say, "Thus Lionel died; there is the hand which killed him." And such a confession might never be made. He had pledged his word to one who, for all he knew, was among the dead whom the sea had claimed. Certain news to had none; but the telegrams said nothing of Herbert Laidlaw, nor was that name

in any list which had come to him from the shipping offices. He believed that his friend was dead, and in death had inflicted this great wrong upon him—that he might win nothing now of life nor set any hope upon his future. How much the resolution cost him, even Jessie would never learn. His hand trembled; his face was that of an old man when he left his room at last to say farewell to her.

How hard it was! She had never looked so girlish as she looked that morning, half sitting, half lying, upon a heavy couch, and wearing a gown of so faint a shade of pink that rose leaves might have stood for its warp and threads of silver for its woof. Twenty days of dreamy life upon a lazy ship had endowed her with new gifts of health and vivacity; and as she reclined there with the sunshine upon her flaxen hair and the animation of youth in every changing gesture, she might well have stood for the eternal type of America's daughters, of their beauty and their energies. Jessie, indeed, was animated by strange uncertainties; and her abounding vivacity owed not a little to that vague pleasure of the unknown which surpasses so surely any happiness of realisation. Whatever the future might have in store for her, she did not believe that the old way of life could continue; and if the old way had been kind and generous to her above the ordinary, nevertheless it was a child's path which henceforth must be quitted for a woman's sphere and a woman's knowledge. She knew—what woman ever remains in ignorance?—that she had won a brave man's love, and she imagined that such an

accident could not fail to bear its early consequences. To-day or to-morrow, what mattered it? The silent companion of her Odyssey would forget his silence and claim her answer. She had determined already that she would let her own heart and circumstances guide her; and while she could remember that she knew nothing whatever of Murray West, save that he was a nomad who had spent ten wild years in America, she anticipated that he would tell her all, the best and the worst, dispelling the darkness of the mystery and leaving her free to say, "Yes, I wish it so." Jessie believed that she could love Murray with all her heart and soul; but that love would not be wholly given until he had spoken and her patient trust had been rewarded. And she made sure that he would speak to-day—now, when, if he did not speak, the silence would be for ever.

She met him with a bright smile and stood up at once as he entered, offering him her hand and pointing to a vase of great white roses which was the chief ornament of her table. For an instant their fingers were interlocked, and both their hearts beat more quickly at that mutual touch.

"Why can't I live without roses, Murray? How good of you it was, though!" she began; but he stopped her abruptly.

"Oh, nonsense; flowers were made for women's hearts. I want to speak to you, Jessie—a real straight talk between two dear friends. Have you got time for that?"

He let her hand drop and set a chair close by the

sofa. Something in his manner checked the freshness of her welcome; and she sought to hide the intensity of her own feelings by a meaningless babble of common talk.

"If I have time? Why, what should I do if I wasn't talking, Murray? Do you know that I've had half the dressmakers in Liverpool here this morning? You must think I am going to Buckingham Palace. But it's real good of you, and I could cry when I remember all you've done for me."

"It will be my turn to cry if you so much as mention it. How do I know that you are not going to Buckingham Palace? As the wife of an exceedingly—well, notorious peer, I should say your destination is assured. Let us talk of something else. When do you expect your father here?"

The tears had welled up in Jessie's eyes when he spoke of Lord Eastry and her marriage; but the discreet question saved her from that impulse which would have cast her in unwomanly humility at his feet that she might sob her confession there and say, "I love you; take me, Murray—do with me what you will." Her eyes were averted when she answered him, though the timbre of her voice modulated the note of tears restrained and a heart that was half broken.

"The cable says that my father will take the first steamer. To-day is Tuesday, so he will be here on Thursday week."

"You will wait for him in London, Jessie; I think it is wiser. The telegram that I sent to Lord Eastry at Monkton is not answered. I presume he is in town;

but a few hours will tell us. Now, do not look at me like that, for I am acting for the best. I want you to go to London to your friends there. In the interval of waiting you will have much to do, but chiefly this—to live apart, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate taking is really one which will make you happy as I wish you to be. Ask yourself if this great position which you have the opportunity of filling is to be lightly refused or abandoned for that which, after all, may not be a true intuition. I shall not seek either to advise or counsel you, because I want this to be your own decision, uninfluenced either by gratitude or friendship. But you will know—yes, Jessie, you will know that my heart is near you; and if any trouble should come, any need, any misfortune, a telegram to the Savoy Hotel will bring me to your side as fast as human agency will allow me. I think that is all. God bless and keep you, little girl! God bless and keep you!”

He stood up, knowing that his resolution was betraying him, and understanding that one weak word, one tremor of his voice, might undo all. Jessie, in her turn, perceived that he was leaving her—he, the truest friend, the bravest heart she had ever known. He was going away into the unknown, far from her. And yet her womanhood forbade the word which would keep him back. He was going and she could not speak it.

“Murray, God bless you, Murray.”

“You will know where to send for me?”

“Yes, yes; I know that, Murray.”

“I shall never cease to remember this day, Jessie.”

"I will remember it, too. Oh! so much, Murray."

"Good-bye again, my little friend, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Murray, if it must be—good-bye."

He was going; she saw his figure turning at the door. A low cry escaped her lips. She tottered forward and held out her hands.

It was too late. The door was shut—he neither saw nor heard her.

CHAPTER XVI

AN OLD FRIEND IS FOUND AGAIN

MURRAY had told the reporter from the *Liverpool Standard* that he had no plans, but this was a mere fashion of speaking, for he knew very well what the next few days would find him doing. If he had thought it better that his parting from Jessie should be abrupt almost to the point of mystery, he had no intention whatever of leaving her unwatched and unguarded in London, and his first act was to telegraph to town that a suite of rooms might be kept for him in an old-world hotel by Trafalgar Square. Thither he went by an early train upon the afternoon of her departure; and so it befell that, just at the moment when she believed herself to be without a friend in the city, Murray kept himself informed of all her movements, and knew almost to the minute when she left her hotel and when she returned to it again. For himself, he saw no one nor desired the company of any man, and it was greatly to his annoyance when, upon the morning of the tenth day, no less a person than our old friend Bertram Sedgwick gained access to his rooms in London, and introduced himself without any sort of apology whatever.

Bertram Sedgwick had not changed, nor had

tragedy left a mark upon him. His crimson, drink-dyed face was no less crimson or drink-dyed than it had been on the *Jersey City*. He wore a grey suit of summer clothes and a panama hat, which he tossed upon the table with the air of one who had the right to this intrusion. Murray observed at a glance that his errand was not a pacific one, for, in spite of his assurance, he quailed a little upon the threshold and followed the valet a little nervously.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"A what?" cried Murray, looking Sedgwick up and down as though he had been some strange animal. "What did you say he was?"

The valet discreetly shut the door, while Sedgwick, not waiting to be asked, seated himself in a low arm-chair.

"Guess you're rather down on an old pal, aren't you?" said he. "That's a funny welcome, anyway. Look here, Mr. West; I don't call myself any names, so you needn't skin a man so. I came up to have a bit of a friendly talk with you."

He was plainly ill at ease and anxious, and he watched his friend very closely, while his hand instinctively touched something in his pocket and lingered there as though to reassure him. Murray, however, appeared to be quite indifferent; he took a big briar pipe from the mantelshelf, and filled it grain by grain.

"Where's Marx?" he asked presently. "What have you done with him?"

"Oh! Marx is all right. He's waiting for me down

at my hotel. He'll be pretty glad to hear of this, for he liked you, did Dicky Marx, sir, notwithstanding his persuasion."

Murray struck a match, and his black eyes shone like lamps above the wavering flame.

"Ah!" he said dryly. "That's touching. When I saw Marx last we were not on speaking terms."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh! he was dead, that is all."

Sedgwick shifted uneasily in his chair, and tried to look as though he were contemplating the fountains outside with a lively and childlike interest.

"Do you mean to tell me that you know it?" he asked after a pause.

"Know it, man? I sent him under with my own hands. I can see his black beard now, washing about his dirty ears. He died badly, but I would not have saved him if I could."

For a little while Sedgwick thought about it with an uncomfortable feeling that the beginning was bad. Such a man, however, cares nothing for mistakes. He was droning away again presently as though all his happiness in life had depended upon Marx.

"You always were a heartless devil!" he exclaimed, in a tone he meant to be flattering. "I'm sorry for poor Marx, though—he was my pal, you know. Twenty-four times we crossed the pond together. Think of that—twenty-four times, and now I must turn the game up. My figure-head is too well known, I guess, and you'll have to do something for me, West. That's what brought me here this morning. I'm

pretty low down, one way and the other, and, of course, I look to my friends. What's the good of calling a man a pal if he turns his back on you directly you are down? You are not the one to do that, I know. If I could get two or three hundred pounds together I'd go out to South Africa and try my luck. There should be work on the mines when Kitchener comes home, and perhaps a good thing to be picked up. You've got plenty of money now—at least I judge so by this parlour. Pay me five hundred pounds, and I give you my word you shall never see me again. That's between gentlemen, for I might put it another way if I chose."

He sat up in the chair just as though he expected that his proposal would provoke some violent outbreak. Murray, however, might have been a figure of stone for all the notice that he took. He had his back to the mantelshelf; his arms were folded; the smoke rolled about him in wreathing clouds.

"Sedgwick," he exclaimed presently, "you'll never get your living as a blackmailer. There's too much of the mothers' meeting about you. Man, why don't you leave that pistol alone? If it went off, it would shoot you through the thigh. Take your hand out of your pocket before you do yourself a mischief."

Taken by surprise, Sedgwick withdrew his hand from his pocket as though he were fingering hot irons.

"How did you know I had a pistol?"

"Oh! that was obvious. You came up by the lift, and you didn't wish to go down through the window. Sedgwick, be careful. It's a long drop."

There was a long pause between them. Neither moved. Murray's pipe still glowed like a furnace; Sedgwick fingered the brim of his dirty straw hat as though feeling for an idea there.

"Five hundred," he remarked presently, with the air of a man adding up a total. "Come, you are a clever chap. You can raise that amount somewhere if you try. Pay me five hundred and see the back of me. I'm cheap at that, by thunder I am!"

"Why should I pay you five hundred, Sedgwick? What for?"

"To keep my tongue still. It's a wicked tongue, I'm d——d if it isn't. That tongue's cost me a fortune in my lifetime, but that's no reason why it shouldn't make me a bit now. Five hundred pounds—what is it? As much as you'll pay for a couple of horses or a stinking runabout."

"The runabouts that I shall buy will not stink. Your ignorance of motor-cars is no less extraordinary than your ignorance of me, Sedgwick. If you have any redeeming feature, it is that you are a somewhat excellent liar. You were immense about Marx. I suppose you have inherited his personal property—two packs of cards and a blackmailing story? Well, I shall not kick you out just yet. I am curious. I want to hear the rest of it. It might be worth the money, you know."

Sedgwick detected a note of hesitation in his voice, and he jumped at what he believed to be surrender.

"Yes," he said, "it's worth that. Now, to begin with, Laidlaw's in London."

Murray knitted his brows and emptied the ash from his pipe into the fire behind him. He had not expected this.

"Go on," he said; "it's not a bad beginning."

"Ah! I knew you'd think that—poor young chap! In a bad way, too. Lying low in a shanty off the Tottenham Court Road, and frightened to go out because of the police. You see, old Golding heard he'd sailed for Europe, and the 'tecs were waiting for him this side. He was picked up by the tramp, but he reshipped and got through with my help. I've been a father to that young man, and precious bad he treats me. There's not a day this week I haven't looked in at 24B, Margaret Street——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Murray, interrupting him. "That's clumsy, Sedgwick. I would have paid you five hundred for that."

Sedgwick's jaw fell.

"What's it matter?" he exclaimed. "How will that help you? Oh, yes; you are chumming with the police, no doubt, and you'll all have a fling together at the Carlton just now. Do you suppose you are strong enough to save him, Murray West?"

"Possibly; we shall see. Don't get angry, Sedgwick; you are only half way through yet. Please go on, my man; I have an appointment at twelve o'clock."

"Yes, you would have. With Jessie Golding, I'll bet. I was going on there myself by-and-by. Seems to me that she ought to know something, and there'll be time to trot down to Scotland Yard afterwards.

Shall we say seven hundred and fifty, my boy? I'm cheap at that, eh?"

"Absolutely a bargain, my dear Sedgwick. If I were running a wax-works just now, I would put you in my chamber of horrors, with the greatest pleasure. As it is——"

He broke off impatiently, and strode towards his writing table in the window. There, he opened a drawer, and taking from it a bundle of papers, he was about to speak again, when he found himself looking down the muzzle of Sedgwick's pistol.

Murray did not move a muscle of his face. His inflection was unchanged when he continued—

"As it is, there is a little story here of a person sometime known as Bert Sedgwick, but once familiar as Roger Daw, a safe thief, which I think will be highly interesting to the particular Yard you speak of. Now, Sedgwick, don't be an ass. If you fire that pistol, you will certainly hang."

"I'm aware of it. There's a point where a man doesn't care a dime either way. I'm going to have seven hundred and fifty pounds out of you, Murray West, or I'm going to swing for it. Now, then, will you pay? I will give you three seconds."

"Unnecessary. I will write you a cheque."

Sedgwick was too utterly astonished for the moment to utter a single word. He still covered his victim with the revolver, his face was crimson with the excitement of success, and the extended arm trembled visibly.

"That's right," he cried; "that's sensible. I don't

mean you any mischief if you treat me fair. When a man's driven he's got to look after himself. Write a cheque and we'll send out and cash it. I'll give you my oath you shall never see me again."

Murray crushed the papers in his hand, and then turned and sat at his writing table. He knew that the barrel of the pistol was within an inch of his ear as he wrote, and there was a moment when he wondered whether those nerveless fingers might not pull the trigger through sheer excitement. But he signed the cheque without a tremor, and having done so, he offered it to Sedgwick with no more concern than if it had been a postcard.

"An open cheque," he remarked quietly. "I will either ring for a messenger to go to the bank, or you shall cash it for yourself. It is over yonder at Charing Cross. Which will you do, Sedgwick?"

The question perplexed the eager man. For one instant—just one—he let the barrel of the pistol drop while he stretched out his left hand for the inviting green paper. The action was fatal to him. Before he could move or cry out long fingers were about his throat, a grip of iron upon his wrist. Not a word could he utter, not a sound escaped him; but the rushing blood buzzed in his ears, and all the room swam before his eyes. When Murray released him he lay prone upon the rug, and his face was black.

"Oh, my God!" he cried. "Give me air—let me breathe."

He lay there moaning for many minutes, while Murray busied himself about the room as though he

were both indifferent to and unconscious of his presence. The pistol had fallen to the ground in the struggle, and rested almost within reach of Sedgwick's hand; but the chambers were empty, and Murray had the cartridges in his pocket. The first act in the drama of blackmail was over, and that which was to come would be in some measure comedy. When Murray had finished his preparations, gathered his papers, and changed his coat, he ordered the prone man to get up in the tone of a slave-driver who has the whip ready.

"Now then, no nonsense. If you are not on your legs in half a minute I shall lift you; and my hands hurt, Sedgwick; they are clumsy and a little hard. Come, will you get up?"

"I must have some brandy, West. You've twisted my windpipe, blast you! Give me some drink if you don't want my death on your hands."

"Oh, get up, get up, Sedgwick. Now, that's it; I told you that my hands hurt. If you squeal like that, you'll bring the police here. Eh, you don't want to see the police, do you, Sedgwick?"

"Just as little as your friend Laidlaw does. My God! you've hands like a vice; I'm black and blue."

"A pretty combination. At Dartmoor I understand they favour browns. Come, Sedgwick. What an escape you had! Think, man; you might have hanged for me."

"I'll do it yet. You call yourself clever, don't you? Well, we'll see. I've a card to play, my man, and it's a high one."

"Something out of your beat, eh? Now, see here,

Sedgwick. I'm going to send for a cab and drive you to Margaret Street. If you as much as open your mouth by the way, I'll give you in charge. I mean that. You know me by this time, and when I mean a thing, it's done. Come along, now, and behave yourself. You shall earn a passage to South Africa from me if you are sensible."

"A passage and a hundred to land with?"

"Perhaps; I'll tell you when I have seen Laidlaw."

They drove without another word to Margaret Street; and, stopping there before a shabby house, Sedgwick admitted that it was their destination, and went up to the first floor with the ready confidence bred of familiarity. Here, in a poor bedroom rarely visited even by a transient gleam of sunshine, a room whose old mahogany bedstead and green rep armchair and thrice-cracked glass spoke of the dregs of auction sales, Murray found his friend, Herbert Laidlaw, once more. The two men met with a silent hand-grip which expressed a depth of emotion words could not fathom. All that they had been, had done, had suffered together, gave place to this joy of knowing that the friend lived. Even Sedgwick would not intrude at such a moment.

"Say, West," he exclaimed in a burst of magnificent generosity, "suppose I go and look at the furniture shops awhile? You two want to hobnob, I reckon. Don't you mind me, now."

"We don't," said Murray, turning sharply; "and we can't do without you, Sedgwick. Just sit down

and make yourself comfortable while Mr. Laidlaw packs his trunks. The air of London does not agree with him, Sedgwick; he needs a little foreign travel. He's going out of town to-day, and you and I must see him off. I can write your cheque afterwards. Oh, it's all right, my man. Don't stand there looking like a prize-fighter. You ought to know that my word's good enough by this time."

Sedgwick edged a little way toward the door, and regarded both of them with a furtive glance which flashed suspicion from both his sunken eyes. It was a curious duel, and so the men understood it; for while Murray was racking his clever brains to save his friend, Sedgwick reminded himself that his weapons were already impotent, since Laidlaw's arrest must mean his own. Murray's promise perplexed him. He was already saying that if he got a hundred and fifty from him, he would get a like sum from Jessie Golding before the day was over.

"I'll take your word right enough," he stammered at last; "but you'll sign the cheque before he goes. See here, West; once he's out in the street my hand's dead."

"Exactly what I have told myself, Sedgwick. When Mr. Laidlaw has left us, you will be of no more value to me than any rogue I might find at Dartmoor. Sit down, man, and wait. Spare me the trouble of teaching you another lesson in good manners. You are really very dense, Sedgwick."

Sedgwick sat down sullenly enough, and Murray took Laidlaw aside and gave him a few brief direc-

tions in a low voice. Greatly depressed in spirit, haggard and melancholy, the young man flung his clothes into a common trunk, and did not even take the trouble to lock it. Once Sedgwick heard him say, "I dare not do it, Murray;" and again, "It's plain madness." But he went on methodically with his work, and presently a four-wheeled cab was called, and he drove away. At this moment Sedgwick stood up in the bully's attitude to protest violently; but Murray just put a hand upon his arm, and he sank down again without a word. He had had his lesson, and would not take another.

"What's it mean?" was the question. "What's he up to, West? The pair of you are mighty smart, but you don't fool me. Do you suppose a man like that rag doll is going to hide from me? Well, I tell you he isn't. I'll be on his doorstep before to-morrow morning—that is, unless you play me fair. If you call yourself a gentleman, give me a cheque. I have taken your word, which is more than many would do. Give me my cheque, and you shall see the last of me. It's a fair deal between us."

Murray, having made quite sure that Laidlaw's cab had turned the corner into Tottenham Court Road, came over from the window and took his hat from the crazy table.

"What were you saying, Sedgwick?" he asked with an assumed air of fine distraction. "I didn't quite catch it."

"I was saying that if you call yourself a gentleman, you'd give me my cheque."

"I don't call myself anything so expensive. Altogether, Sedgwick, I think I would sooner be a man than what is commonly called a gentleman."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to play me false?"

"Tut, tut! Listen to him. My dear Sedgwick. I am not. I am going to the office of the Union Steamship Company to take you a ticket."

"To hell with the ticket! I want two hundred pounds."

"A passage to the Cape and a hundred when you land there—I think that was the arrangement? You have a very poor memory, Sedgwick."

Sedgwick's reply was a torrent of oaths which would have put a trooper to shame. In plain truth, he had been a blackmailer all his life; but here were a man and a situation of which he could make nothing. The one card remaining to him was Jessie Golding. He could go to her and say, "Herbert Laidlaw shot your brother, and Murray West stood by." But what she would pay for that particular piece of information he could not imagine; and, moreover, there was the personal risk to himself, in that, directly he played this card, Murray would certainly give him into custody. His sense of the delicacy of his position could be expressed in no other way than by those strange exclamations which startled the dismal house and even arrested passers-by upon its threshold.

"What are you?" he shouted in hysterical defiance. "Where do you come from? Shall I say you were a shoe-knot in Kansas country? You dirty nigger!

Oh, I'll have it out of you ; I'll have it out of your rotten bones, by—— I will."

He raved on, irresolute and incoherent, while Murray leant against the door of the room and regarded him more with pity than with anger.

"Sedgwick," he said at last, "you would have made a capital skipper of a nigger ship. I think a little reflection will be good for you. If you come to me to-morrow morning—upon your knees, Sedgwick—I may still be willing to buy that passage for you. For the present you are much safer here. You have an inspiring outlook—upon a fried-fish shop and a pawnbroking establishment. If you don't learn to control that evil tongue of yours, you will certainly visit the one and may be very glad to have credit at the other. I wish you good-morning, Sedgwick. If I hear your voice outside, I shall certainly send for a policeman."

He took the key from the lock with the words, and as the burly man rushed upon him he flung him lightly back upon the table, the legs of which gave way so that Sedgwick fell heavily in a shower of splinters, and lay half stunned by the window. There Murray left him, and having advised the tailor upon the ground floor by no means to open the door until the gentleman above had recovered his temper, he hailed a passing cab and returned to his hotel.

Strange thoughts followed him. He knew that the day must be memorable in his life, for this afternoon Jessie would know the truth about her brother's death ; and here was the stranger thing—that the man who had killed him would tell her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE IMAGE IN THE MIRROR

UPON the afternoon of the day when Murray found Herbert Laidlaw and carried him from Margaret Street to his hotel in Trafalgar Square, Jessie entertained her old school-fellow, now Mrs. "Nolly" Baring, to lunch at the Savoy. Though the month of July was nearly done, the Savoy Hotel did not lack clients, and its kaleidoscopic pictures were the settings of tragedies no less secret, and comedies no less amusing, than those which fed the *chroniques scandaleuses* at the fuller tide of the season. Here in dark corners by the restaurant, elderly gentlemen from the Law Courts tried to look eminently professional as they waited for lunch and consultation. Smart young men with triumphant collars adopted the fashionable bend as they inclined gracefully toward glittering showers of gauze and chiffon, in whose heart pretty faces might be detected, and eyes which needed little skill to read them. Newspaper proprietors, hungry and affable, discussed their schemes with timid contributors of prodigious appetite and insatiable expectation. All that little company, changing its outposts daily, yet remaining in substance the same from year's end to year's end, passed to and fro before Jessie while she

waited. The eminent K.C., who, if he came late, certainly did not go away early; stars from the Musical Comedy, about whom the planets of inanity revolved pathetically; Lady Dicky this and Lady Harry that; a judge; an author—these were the centrepieces to which the *va et vient* added its asset of busy Americans, inquisitive, pushing, and full of life, who would lunch at the Savoy to-day, and dismiss Rome before the week was done. Jessie, however, was not interested even by these. Had the question been put to her, she would have admitted that nothing had interested her since she left Murray at Liverpool and embarked upon this strange journey. Friends she had in town; the American Ambassador was her personal friend; there were women enough who had purchased “man” in the English market, and were now making the best of him in the highways of the world. But Jessie could not tell her story to such as these; nor did she desire their confidence. Until Bernard Golding could reach London from New York she must stand alone, and her own wit must be both her confessor and her counsellor. The situation both perplexed and pleased her; she preferred to be alone, and yet sometimes was afraid of loneliness.

Jessie, like most of her sisters, had but a modicum of that which is called sentiment. A certain independence of spirit filtered for her, as it were, the mawkish ideas which she had carried from the school-room to the boudoir. She would have laughed at the notion of what the romancers call “passionate affection”—at least, she would have laughed three months

ago. New York had taught her its lesson truly, and she had chaunted the hymeneal office with the most callous of the choristers. Through the valley of marriage she would attain to the sunny heights of notoriety and good times and ancestral seats and the surpassing joys of coronets. For ever and for ever, as the hymn-books have it, she would winter at "Montey" and "spring" at the Hotel Ritz, and be seen at Buckingham Palace in June, and known at all the sporting parties in the golden autumns of her bliss. Love, she said, was for kitchenmaids and the puppets of the novelists—Jessie had no friend who could tell her of such a folly as this; and when her marriage with Lord Eastry had been arranged, she accepted it with a child-like belief in her destiny and the assurance that it was necessary—nay, indispensable to her happiness. How glad her friends had been! What congratulations had been showered upon her! For one memorable week the papers seemed to vie with one another in the presentation of her portrait. Nothing in her life or in the life of Gerald, Baron Eastry, had been accounted sacred by these ferrets of the press; and Jessie remembered with a sigh the terrible headlines in those newspapers which exposed Gerald's many amiable weaknesses. Moreover, she knew that her own feelings about this marriage had been entirely passive. The prospect of a great position dazzled and delighted her; she foresaw herself ruling a great household, reigning in London, foremost in her set, one of America's chosen daughters; and in spite of all, these things could dazzle her even now. She would ask

herself why she proposed to give them up, and for whom? When the answer was, "To a man to whom you owe your life," a devil's advocate would whisper, "Yes, but vanity was his motive; and if he had not saved you, you would have been with the others in the boat." In the same breath she would compel herself to admit that if Murray West's life had been an honest one, he would have told her more of it. Like her sisters of the splendid four hundred, she rarely read the newspapers; and none had told her of the rumours now beginning to gather about his name. She was left to ask what possible reason could he have for hiding his story from the woman he wished to love? She knew nothing even of his means; and while she had some reason to think that they were considerable, and money was the least part of it, she feared at the same time that when she did know all, the truth would dismay her. Sometimes her own unquenchable humour would come to her assistance, and she would ask if girl were ever placed in such a quandary before—a stranger in a strange hotel; a would-be bride waiting for a bridegroom who had not as yet sent her one line of greeting; in love with a man—yes, she knew that she was in love—who had not the courage to ask her love in return. That, indeed, was droll, Jessie said; and Gerald's silence was not the least embarrassing feature in a situation full of perplexities.

Here was her breviary in the interval of waiting for her friend whom all the world called Mrs. Nolly Baring. A question at the office as she came up had failed to disclose the expected telegram from Lord

Eastry. Jessie was almost ashamed to ask for telegrams now; yet when her friend was announced their first word was of telegrams.

"Oh! my dear, dear Jess! Now, has he written? Have you heard from him?"

"Oh, don't ask me, Connie. It makes me tired to think of it."

She led the way to the restaurant, and they sat apart at a little table on the balcony. Mrs. Nolly Baring was Jessie's one intimate friend in all London—a witty, shrewd daughter of Boston, married four years ago to Oliver Baring, the Privy Councillor, and since that time the centre of a set not less notorious for its war with ancient covenants than for its creation of new. Mrs. Nolly was garbed in a gown which caused heads to turn even in the Savoy. Her laugh had a musical cadence, high and hard; her eyes were grey, and wonderfully keen in their perception of the enemy's deficiencies. One swift glance told her exactly who was lunching at the Savoy and who was not; the waiters followed her meekly in an atmosphere redolent of musk and violets.

"So your father is coming to-morrow, Jess," she began leisurely, and then remarked, "Well, that's good news, any way."

"Yes," said Jessie with a sigh; "I suppose it's that, dear. He thinks I'm with Gerald, and so he won't worry. I wonder what he would say if I cabled the whole story—not a word from my boy, not a word from anyone? Isn't it just like a play? I told Gerald so when I wrote to him yesterday."

"Oh! So you did write to him?"

"Yes, and tore the letter up. I always write when I feel things. It does me good to put down everything I should like to say. I told Gerald yesterday just what I thought about him for not being in London when I arrived. Oh, Connie, you don't know what a temper I have when things go wrong. I feel as if I must do something mad—shout, cry, hurt myself or anybody. Then it goes with a rush, and I am as serenely calm as the angels."

"Are they serenely calm, my dear? I don't know much about them. Our country must have changed if anything serenely calm can come out of it. Do you remember Doctor Penfold, in Boston, who used to preach on Sunday about holy peace, and hustle all over the town on Monday like a college boy? We were not made for pastoral scenes, Jess. Noll says I am never happy if I am in the same place for two weeks together. I know it is true; I want to move, move, move all the time. I want to see people—lots of them; to know exactly what Paris is doing, and London is doing, and Homburg is doing. A country house party tires me in three days. I begin to fade away into an ethereal nothing, which Noll says is the blessed state of the heathen out East. So, you see, my Paradise is assured; and, if you don't mind, I will drink some still Moselle."

Jessie had forgotten the wine, and she hastened to send the waiter for it. When their glasses were filled and a few remarks about their neighbours had amused them, they returned to the inevitable topic.

"When did you last hear from Gerald? Surely you had a telegram on the steamer? He must have told you exactly what he was going to do, dear."

Jessie admitted that he had done so.

"Yes," she said; "he did send me a telegram, Connie, but I cannot remember where it came from. My father was in London then, and I was to come straight to him at this hotel. The last letter I had from Gerald was written from the Ritz Hotel at Paris. He did write such nonsense, I don't remember half of it. For one thing he said that he had been on his motor-car in Spain, and that all the people there thought he was very like the German Emperor. It seemed to please him. The time before it was the Czar. Just like a man, isn't it? And oh! the vanity of the species, Connie—the vanity!"

"My dear Jess, men would be very dull creatures if they were not vain. That is the superiority of the sex. Do you think Eve would have escaped from the Garden of Eden if Adam had not had a good opinion of himself? I rather like Gerald's conceit. He is plainly dissatisfied with the ego as it is, and reflects upon the ego as it might be. I see great possibilities in the husband. You will attach him to your apron strings with a rope of pearls. The ego to which he will now transfer his imagination will be his pretty wife, whose portrait is in the illustrated papers. She is going to redecorate Monkton Castle, and he will say, 'My wife did it.' For some months to come I prophesy that this obedient young man will be showing his treasure to all the country. 'Oh, my wife is so

clever, you know.' 'Yes, Jessie drives splendid horses, doesn't she?' 'She can ride too—why, yes.' 'I am just going over to Paris to buy her a new car, white and red and something dainty.' 'She's a great athlete.' 'Oh, yes; they can't dress like her, can they?' That is what I hear the obedient one saying, Jess, and I envy you—of course I do. You are beginning at the beginning, and there's the fun. If I had Monkton, I should furnish it and unfurnish it every three months to keep myself amused."

Mrs. Nolly ended her tirade with a stately sweep of her tortoiseshell glass, and having satisfied herself that she was the cynosure of many eyes, she pressed a new question upon Jessie and insisted upon an answer.

"How many telegrams have you sent to Gerald since you landed at Liverpool?"

"How many? Why do you think I have nothing to do but to cable a man who keeps away from me?"

"Absurd, my dear! As if any man could keep away from Jessie. There is some mistake. Either he has not received your cable or he is on his yacht. I mean to find out which, before the day is over. The situation is becoming ridiculous, and you must be saved from it, Jessie."

"Poor little me! As if it mattered. Do you really suppose I am so very anxious to marry Gerald?"

"My dear, you are not allowed any reflection in the matter. A woman who reflects is lost."

"Why is she lost, Connie? She might think that she were saved?"

"Saved? What a heresy! Saved from Monkton Castle and a family which carried bows for the Conqueror? I forbid you to talk nonsense, Jessie. You know perfectly well that there is not a woman in New York who does not envy you. And are you just? Gerald is probably racing across Europe at this very moment—special trains, special steamers, hustle everywhere—to arrive. Oh, I know it's vexing, but we are going to make it better. I shall take you down to Fenton Court to-day, and we will go to Ascot together. You need change, excitement, chatter. I should mope to death in this great hotel, and I am sure you are doing it. Just tell the maid to pack your bag and come off right now. I will leave a letter for Mr. Golding, and you can send round to Gerald's chambers and tell him what you have done."

Jessie shook her head.

"It's very kind of you, Connie, but I am a fixture. I could not let my father come here and find me gone. I want to see him so much, and I'm sure he wants me badly. Do you know, Connie, that if Gerald sent for me now, I don't believe I should go to him. It is not a pretence, really. If a man cared for a girl he would not run away to Paris or to Homburg directly they told him she was dead. No, he would not do that; but, you see, Gerald has done it. I wrote to him yesterday and told him I should never marry him. The letter's in my waste-paper basket now, but I wish I had sent it."

"You don't wish anything of the kind, Jessie. Such a wish would be a libel upon our sex. What,

turn your back on Monkton because a yacht is not as fast as a fire-engine? You silly girl, you haven't the least idea what you are saying."

Jessie sank back a little wearily into her chair and admitted that this was true.

"How could I have?" she protested. "Why, I have lived a whole lifetime since I left New York. Do you know, Connie, that when I wake up at night now I often think that I am still on the sea. It all comes back to be just as though I must go through it every day as long as I live. I shall never forget those hours or the man who lived through them with me. Yes, he was a man, I know it, and when a woman makes up her mind about anyone, Connie, she doesn't easily change it. Murray West is the truest gentleman I have ever known. Don't pout at me. I shall never see him again."

"And a good thing, too. When we begin to let this kind of sentiment guide us, Jess, we are done for. Oh, I know the story—you needn't repeat it. He was the hero in wolves' clothing. He stood by you, vowed to protect you, and then made love to you. Such is the common course which this kind of animal pursues. Time and circumstance give him a halo and a martyr's shrine. It is so different when we come to reality, and the old ways are taken up. I think he was wise to leave you at Liverpool, for such a man knows his own disadvantages in London. The comparisons begin; the rough diamonds are such poor things when we see others. You will forget this man, Jess, and think no more of him. That is womanly wisdom, my dear; the

sagacity of a mature thirty. Did I say thirty? Well, that's to you. The society papers still keep me in the twenties."

She turned with a laugh to greet some woman of her acquaintance who passed by to a table near them, and thereafter, until the end of their meal, the presence of others forbade further pursuit of a subject so difficult. Not, indeed, until they separated at the head of the staircase could another word be spoken, and then it was but a brief one.

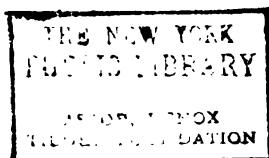
"Now mind you send me a telegram, dear," Mrs. Nolly whispered. "I shall just be dying to hear where Gerald is."

"I will tell him how anxious you were," Jessie answered, kissing her on both cheeks. And so they parted, the one to her carriage with the smart roans, the other following the corridor towards her sitting-room.

Jessie had spoken in jest when she promised to tell Gerald—indeed, her thoughts were far removed from Monkton Castle and its master, and were set upon a different subject altogether, when, at the corner of the corridor where she should have turned to find her room, she suddenly perceived her own figure in the great looking-glass, and stood for a moment, as woman will, to be quite sure that her hat was straight and her skirt well hung. Such an interesting employment occupied her when she first became aware that someone was watching her intently from the alcove by the fireplace; and gradually, to her amazement, this figure took definite shape in the glass, and she per-



" SHE PERCEIVED THE FACE OF NO OTHER THAN GERALD "



ceived the face of no other than Gerald, her *fiancé*, whose amazement appeared to be no less than her own. So startled was she, so utterly surprised, that for an instant she had no will even to turn or to move from the spot, but making a great effort at last, she cried, "Why, Gerald!" and ran to meet him gladly.

But this was the surprising thing—that when she turned from the image in the mirror the corridor was full of strangers, and Gerald was not among them.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONFESSION

JESSIE drew a great armchair up to the window of her sitting-room, and sat down for what she called a "square talk" with herself. Until five minutes ago nothing on earth would have persuaded her to admit that she was superstitious; and even now that the thing had happened, she tried in many ways to meet it by a natural process of ratiocination, which, however, entirely failed to convince her. And so she sat, now laughing, now afraid; but always conscious that she stood shoulder to shoulder with events, and that the end was near.

Gerald there in the Savoy Hotel! It was too ridiculous to be worth a grain of credence. Gerald, her *fiancé*, whose passionate vows and ardent protestation had almost compelled her to believe that he loved her—that he should be in London and should avoid her! No, her pride could not stoop to that humiliation. None the less, she was sure, quite sure, of that which she had seen. The mirror showed her Gerald's face beyond the shadow of a doubt. She had seen him cross the corridor and pause for a moment in the alcove by the staircase. He was but little changed, she thought—a trifle paler, perhaps, and the shoulders rounder and more prominent; but it was the same boyish countenance,

the same vacant eyes, that inane glance which it had amused her to mimic in the days before she became engaged to him. Yes, she never could make so ridiculous a mistake, and the question of identity could not be further argued. Gerald had been to the hotel, had seen her there, and had left her without a word. No weapon in the armoury of her logic could do battle with so plain an affront. It was final, unanswerable, she said; and in the same breath her curiosity prevailed, and the desire to know and to understand became almost insupportable.

Jessie was neither more nor less vain than her sisters, but her saving grace was common-sense, which she had inherited abundantly, and could rely upon even at such an hour as this. Given overmuch to passionate outbursts upon trifles, the really serious things of life often found her strangely calm and self-collected; and so it was upon that memorable day. A tempest of anger quickly gave place to a searching interrogation which put the *pros* and *cons* with a lawyer's skill and more than a lawyer's interest. Her supposition that Gerald had seen her was, after all, but a supposition; he might, for all she knew to the contrary, have been seeking her out at the very moment she accused him. Or again, it was even possible that he did not yet know of her safety, and had been as alarmed and bewildered as she was, when he perceived her figure in the glass. Jessie laughed aloud when she said that Gerald had been frightened by a living ghost and had fled from it incontinently; but, in that case, her idea was that he would speedily

return, and that she might find herself face to face with him before the clock struck again.

And if he came, what should she do?

Should she say, "Yes, I am ready, Gerald, I wish to be your wife"? Or should she tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?—"I do not love you. I shall be unfaithful to myself if I marry you. I have learned to love another."

Here was a question that Jessie could not answer. It was her lot, as it appeared, to be surrounded by bewilderments. Murray was always in her thoughts, and yet of Murray's life she knew little more than the first passer-by upon the Embankment without. This strong, silent man touched her imagination as none she had ever known; won upon her admiration and awakened within her a new sense of her womanhood. But the mystery baffled her none the less, and put a curb upon her heart. She did not believe that she would ever give herself to one who hid his past from her and forbade her to speak of it. And yet she could not keep his image from her mind, and each hour—nay, each minute—created it anew and won her worship for it. The happiness of all the years was Murray's, to give or to withhold; and if he failed her, then, indeed, might she abandon hope. Jessie understood this now, for the day of self-deception was for ever done with.

She waited in the silent room listening to every foot-fall in the corridor, and fearing that any moment might bring Gerald to her door. The prospect before her windows—London's splendid river, the half-

sunken barges, the black-hulled tugs, spire and steeple, the hurrying crowds upon the Embankment, Westminster in its golden haze, as holy ground apart recalled to her the immensity and yet the loneliness of this great city which harboured her. To whom might she appeal? Of whom seek counsel or friendship? She determined at last to seek it of none. Her own independence should fight the battle for her and win the victory. She was an American, and afraid of nobody. Why should she fear? Why brood like any child over a morbid craving for misfortunes? Jessie determined to be up and busy; and rising from her chair, she perceived for the first time that a letter and a telegram lay upon her table, and that they had been too long neglected. So she took them up, and the envelope of the telegram was already torn, when the long-expected knock came, and she started as though surprised in a guilty act. Gerald had come then! He was in the hotel, after all. The weird story of the glass was just such a commonplace event as she had imagined it to be.

She cried, "Come in!" and for one instant touched her hair with her hand while she posed before the long mirror and remarked the heightened colour of her cheeks and the brightness of her eyes. She was about to meet the man whose wife she had promised to be. No doubt he would meet her with one of those exhibitions of passionate ardour which he could command so readily. Jessie trembled a little when she reflected that he would kiss her and hold her in a boyish embrace, defying her explanations and perhaps making

them impossible. Not often in her young life had she been so completely at a loss or so entirely robbed of her self-possession; nor had she the remotest idea of that which she would say to Gerald.

"Oh, come in—come in! I am here. What are you waiting for?"

The door opened inch by inch with aggravating slowness. A pale, freckled face appeared in the shadows; blinking eyes stared upon the threshold, but appeared to lack all volition. Jessie regarded the apparition with wonder. She recognised the face and the figure; but surprise—and, it may be annoyance—robbed her for a moment of words.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Laidlaw—for it was he—advanced a little way into the room, and then halted as though afraid of the temerity which had carried him so far.

"Herbert Laidlaw," he began to stammer presently. "I was on the steamer—Murray West's friend. Don't you remember?"

His hand trembled while he spoke; his eyes shifted furtively as though he were seeking a way of escape. Jessie was half afraid that he had lost his reason; but she had recovered her self-possession by this time, and the idea that this intruder carried a message from Murray was by no means displeasing to her.

"Oh, yes, of course," she exclaimed, brightly. "We used to call you the 'Lamb'—that is to say—But I ought not to have told you. Won't you sit down, Mr. Laidlaw? How very stupid of me!"

She was laughing and acting all in a breath, and

while his strange manner and halting speech perplexed her greatly, she concealed her apprehensions and tried to divert him.

"I'm real pleased that you came," she ran on. "It seems like a brighter chapter to that dreadful story. Just think of it! All those poor people lost, and they were friends of ours, and we talked with them and walked with them every day. You must tell me all about yourself—what happened—where were you? I'm just dying to know."

Laidlaw watching her with feverish eyes, took heart at the trend of conversation, and spoke out with a little more confidence. He had come to that room to speak the word which would bring Jessie to Murray's heart; but his courage ebbed minute by minute, and he was telling himself already that the word had better remain unspoken.

"I wanted to look in, hearing you were about," he began clumsily enough. "Murray said he thought I might call."

"Murray—Mr. West? Did he send you, then? I didn't know that he was in London."

"Oh, but he is, though. He's at—well, perhaps I oughtn't to tell you where he is."

"Indeed! And why not, Mr. Laidlaw?"

Her quick eyes turned upon him a little anxiously. He had not meant to take such a *faux pas*, and now that it was taken his habit of cunning compelled him to retrace it with a lie.

"Oh, it doesn't matter much, anyway. Murray's at the Métropole, you know."

"That's the hotel just by Charing Cross, isn't it?"

"Yes, just so—the big one next door to the Victoria. Lucky chap, wasn't he, to be saved like that. I had a hell of a—no, I mustn't say that. I mean it was pretty rough on me, for I jumped when the steamer was going down, and the second engineer he jumped with me. You see, a woman dropped a life-buoy close by, and I got hold of it."

"Brave of you, Mr. Laidlaw—quite brave!"

"You mean I shouldn't have taken it. Well, perhaps not; but when a man sees the water about his feet he doesn't always know what he is doing. I don't say that I'm a hero, because I'm not. We're made different, eh; and some of us are brave and some are the other thing, and there you have it. I tell you I don't want to go on a steamer again as long as I live, and that's all about it. We were eight hours in the water, and only picked up by an off-chance. I didn't get any life into me for three days afterwards, and even now I'm not what I used to be."

Jessie was not touched by the recital of this calamity, nor would she go so far as to express a pity she did not feel. Talk of Murray had carried her back to the day when this youth had been called Murray West's "lamb," and sympathy had been showered upon him because of his childish simplicity. How differently time had written that story out! The "Rogue" had justified himself indeed; but this pale-faced, stammering boy, what had time to say for him?

"You call yourself unfortunate, Mr. Laidlaw," she said at last; "and remember all the poor souls who

perished that dreadful night. Of course, we can't forget it—none of us ever will. For my part I don't want to forget it; I'm just asking all the time why Providence chose me—just insignificant little me. Have you asked yourself that? I'm sure you haven't, or you would speak differently."

"Oh, it's all the odds—I don't believe in anything else. Nature, or whatever you call it, tosses us up in a box and pitches out the first that comes. It doesn't matter a straw who you are or what you've done; it's all the same in the long run. Here am I alive, and better men dead. Well, it's luck; I'm not going into hysterics about it."

"There is no need to. If you don't feel Goodness and Providence all about you, I don't see why you want to live. Mr. West didn't send you to me to say that, I know. He's a good man, and I can esteem him for being so."

"You're right to do that. Murray's a good sort; I don't know a better. They told all sorts of lies about him down in Jackson City, but, you see, he was always a bit standoffish, and that upset them. He came out with clean hands, did Murray West, and that's more than I did. I am an unlucky one, Miss Golding. Just a knot in a shoe-string, and you can't untie me. I have been unlucky all my life, and I don't suppose times are going to change. Perhaps I'd have done better not to have picked up that life-buoy—I dunno. This old riddle they call life hasn't got any answer so far as I can make out; you go on guessing all the time, and you never get there. If I'd been born any-

thing else but a parson's son, it might have been different. Parsons' sons always go to the devil—can't say why, but I know they do. They put off the old man, you know, as the Scriptures say, and take up with the young woman. I was the third of six down Essex way, and all the education I got was three years at a charity grammar school. Then the old man sold the church bells or something, and sent me out to America. He called that doing his duty by me, and I landed in New York with five pounds and a tobacco pouch. America's a pretty tough place for a youngster, anyway, and so I found out before I'd been there a month. I tell you straight, Miss Golding, though I was a parson's son, I have swept floors and blacked boots for a living before now. When I got down south, the sun put a bit of life into me, and I bucked up and made a new start. I could always ride a bit, for my governor had the run of Lord Beecher's hacks at home, and riding was about the only thing I had to do. When they found I wasn't a tenderfoot they took to me right enough, and down in Jackson City I struck Murray West and did him a service. You would not think—would you, when you look at me?—but I saved Murray's life—that was down in Tennessee, where he got thrown in a corral with a she-devil of a colt on the top of him, and I was the only man who'd go in and fetch him out. I was always fond of horses, don't you know, and it didn't seem anything to me. There he was, with the mare biting at him just like an angry woman, and not one of the chaps would stir. I pulled a stake out of the ground and got the mare on

it when she reared up to strike him. We were pals after that, and of course, we stood by each other just as we shall stand by each other now. You won't believe anything you hear about Murray West, will you? That's what I wanted to say. I came here to tell you as much to-day, though it is a liberty."

Jessie, in truth, had been debating the object of his visit ever since he entered the room, and this lengthy confession did not enlighten her. Just as he had convinced himself word by word that it would be dangerous to obey Murray's command and to make a clean breast of it, so now his clumsy avowals had but this effect—that they set Jessie's mind asking, "Has he come to speak for Murray?" The two men had parted upon a clear understanding. "Go to her," Murray had said, "and tell her that it was by your hand her brother fell. Claim her forgiveness in my name. Say that it is the first and last request I have to make of her. She will refuse me nothing. You are quite safe, Herbert," and this confidence had sent this derelict of a tragedy to the Savoy. Something in Jessie's manner repelled him, however. He did not believe that Murray had judged her rightly; and remembering Bernard Golding's terrible grief for his son, his anger against the assassin, and the reward he had offered for his capture, Laidlaw's resolution oozed away, until he was as firmly determined not to confess as erstwhile he had been ready to tell all.

Jessie, on her part, found her interest awakened to an extraordinary degree. Her questions were subtle and penetrating.

"You were with Mr. West for some years in Tennessee?" she exclaimed after a pause. "Then you must have known him very well, Mr. Laidlaw. Of course, you did, or you would not speak like this."

Laidlaw took up the challenge instantly, and it was with relief that he found her more willing to speak of Murray than of himself.

"Yes," he rejoined; "I suppose I may say that I knew him pretty well. He never spoke much about himself, and who or what he was in England I really do not know. I did hear once that he had been in the cavalry, and had to clear out because he was stone broke. We used to call him 'My Lord' in Jackson City, because of the fine airs he gave himself. I think his father went smash in England, and that's why he dropped his right name. We lived together on Colman's Ranch in Tennessee for nearly three years. I think he paid a bit for his board and took the rest out managing the horses. He's a rare good shot, Miss Golding. I never saw a better man at flying game in my life; and as for riding, I believe he could sit an ostrich. We chummed together on the farm, and he tried to make me take an interest in the things he liked. Now and then he'd have a case of books out from England, and we read them; but I've no head for that sort of stuff, and a precious lot of good it did me. When I left him he was going out West on a mining job; but I went up to Jackson City and tried to run a store there. When Murray came back he found me dead broke and the store sold up. He'd a good deal of money at that time, and he traded in

horses on his own account. Perhaps he'd have settled down there and married if something hadn't happened to bring him to England. I hear he is coming into a pot of money, though I don't know whether it is true. Perhaps he has told you something about it?"

Jessie shook her head. She was trying to gather up the threads of this tangled story, and to weave them into a consequent narrative. For the trivialities of Murray's life she cared but little; the essential facts of it alone interested her. And to this interest was added the recurring question, "Why had this young man sought her out?"

"You say that Mr. West might have married?" she suggested with an obvious purpose. "Had he many friends, then, in Jackson City?"

"Oh, all the girls swore by him, you know. They like a man they can't understand. He was about the only gentleman in the place; and if he'd have lifted his little finger, the best girl there would have married him. I used to chaff him about it sometimes; but he is not a man you can have a joke with. When the trouble came——"

"What trouble are you speaking of, Mr. Laidlaw? Your own or Mr. West's?"

Laidlaw looked up at her sharply, and found her blue eyes set upon him in a new anxiety. His eloquence withered before her glance, and he began to stammer again.

"Oh! I mean—well, of course, when he began to be unpopular there. They did not like his standoffishness, you know, as I told you, and the men were pretty

sick because he cut them out. That's all I mean to say. What made you think it was anything else?"

Jessie was silent for a little while, but when she spoke again it was to ask him the very last question he had wished to hear.

"If you lived in Jackson City," she remarked with some emphasis, "you must have known my brother Lionel. Is that not so?"

"Yes," he stammered, averting his eyes; "I knew your brother, Miss Golding."

"Were you in Jackson City at the time of his death?"

The face was still averted, the hands fingered the brim of the hat nervously.

"Yes—that is, I was living there, you know, but not in the place at the time."

"Then you can tell me why they connected Mr. West's name with my brother's?"

"Yes, I know that, but, you see, Murray was fifty miles away when it happened. He didn't know anything about it, I will take my oath. If people talked, it was because he and your brother Lionel never hit it off together. There was nothing else, believe me; Murray's too good a chap to hurt anyone."

Jessie sighed, but said nothing. She wondered why she had listened to such a tissue of lies with such patience. Murray himself had told her that Lionel had died in his arms. What object, then, was served by these flagrant untruths? Had Murray sent his friend here to be the agent of his mendacities? She

determined to hear no more, and rising from her chair she held out her hand to Laidlaw.

"Mr. West has found an interesting advocate," she said a little coldly. "I shall not forget what you have said. My brother Lionel's death has been the great grief of my life. Some day, Mr. Laidlaw, I shall know the truth. When I do so, the man whom that truth concerns had better keep far away from me."

Laidlaw was very frightened, but he did not lose his self-possession.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed. "Of course, I understand, and I will tell Murray. I see you are busy now, so I must be getting back. It has been pleasant to talk to you and say all I know. West's always mum about himself. It takes people a long time to find out what he's worth."

"I found that out long ago," retorted Jessie, turning her back; and so they parted.

It had been nearly four o'clock in the afternoon when Laidlaw entered her room; it was five when he left it. Mystified as Jessie was by his visit, utterly unable to make anything of it, her thoughts reverted naturally to the scene which had preceded it, and to her interview with Mrs. Nolly. There, in her hand, was the telegram she had taken up at the moment of Laidlaw's intrusion. Jessie opened the telegram indifferently, hardly conscious of that which she did. When she set it down her cheeks were crimson, and the hand which held the paper trembled.

"Am at Holly Lodge, Whitchurch, and unable to get to you. Expect you to-night. Love. Gerald."

This, then, was the message so long delayed—this the summons she had so greatly dreaded. "Unable to get to you." How simple the story was! And her shaken nerves had shaped the image for her, and imagination had done the rest, and Gerald was waiting for her all the time. To-day, for the first time, perhaps, he knew of her safety. Jessie admitted that she had woefully misjudged him, and, driven by the doubt and a new sense of her own loneliness, she determined, upon an impulse, to visit Whitchurch, and there learn the best or the worst. So much she owed to the man whom the world called her lover, that she should go to him and say, "It cannot be—I love another."

CHAPTER XIX

THE WOMAN AND THE RING

SHE held to this resolution, despite an inner consciousness of its possible results. Face to face with Gerald, she might be unable to resist the turn of circumstances; and she foresaw that her own unstable intentions might prove weaker than her *fiancé's* insistence. That Gerald would wish their marriage to take place immediately was plain to her from the first; and feeling uncertain, harassed, and alone, she would not deny that marriage might be a possible release from the grave doubts which troubled her. Her love for Murray became dumb before the renewed mystery of his life. She no longer believed him to be wholly earnest, and Laidlaw's confession but added to her sense of slight. Why had he come to the Savoy Hotel at all if not to speak for his friend? And if Murray needed an advocate, then it was true that some page of his life might not be read by her without shame, or turned by him without remorse. She was ready to do him justice; in her heart there dwelt that deep womanly longing for love and sympathy which lies apart altogether from passion or the more vulgar emotions; but her pride rebelled against neglect, and she could never forget that he had left her at the moment when she had most need

of him. Jessie knew that she would never wholly obliterate Murray's image from her memory; but she had spirit enough to say that no man should humble her or win her love by silence. And in this spirit, defiant and full of purpose, she set out for Paddington and the Great Western Railway.

She had no maid; her luggage was a hand-bag. Had she been schooled in England she might have feared to set out upon such an errand; for she knew nothing of Gerald's present circumstances, nor of those who were with him at Pangbourne. But scruples of that kind were entirely foreign to her nature; and remembering that she was going to the house of a man who claimed her for his wife, she went unhesitatingly and with not a little relief. It was something, after all, to escape the bustle and clamor of London; to leave the fret of the city far behind her, and to go out to the woods and rivers of this garden land of England which might henceforth become her home. Jessie never disguised her love for England, nor her sense of its beauties. "Everything is so big in my country," she would say, "and we all live in public. If a man builds a house, he doesn't fence it round so that no one shall see it, but he just invites the whole city up to stare through his windows and price the silver on his breakfast table. Your country is all a garden. There are more flowers in Kent than in half America. We have great things, too. California is the most beautiful country on earth—but it's so far away; and when one travels in Eastern America, why, it's just flat, flat, flat all the way. I like England be-

cause one can be alone, and you can't do that in America, unless you're a wild man."

Jessie was very much alone that afternoon; but the hazard of her visit and its possible consequences made the journey a short one, and she had arrived at Pangbourne Station almost before she realised why she had come and what she had to do. To the clerk at the Savoy she said, "I am going down to Whitchurch in Oxford, to Lord Eastry's house. I may return to-night if there is a train; should my father come, please ask him to send me a telegram." But she left no other message, and confident that she would be able to return to London by the last train, she alighted at Pangbourne and asked news of Lord Eastry.

"Holly Cottage, at Whitchurch—how many blocks is that away?"

A polite and very spruce station-master, captivated immediately by so charming a questioner, confessed his ignorance of the American language, but volunteered information very readily.

"I really don't understand you, miss. Were you speaking of Lord Eastry's place?"

"I was so, and, of course, I'm just stupid. Can I walk up, or shall I want a carriage?"

The station-master looked perplexed, and regarded his interrogator with a new interest.

"Then you're not expected, miss. I haven't seen his Lordship's 'broom' to-day—at least, not since he went up to town this morning."

"Oh, my! Then he did go into the city this morning?"

"By the ten o'clock train, I believe. If you'll wait a minute, I'll ask the porter—I'm nearly sure of it, though."

He beckoned a sour-faced porter who trundled a barrow with becoming leisure, and was not very sure about anything.

"His Lardship? Well, I dunno eggsackly, but I've a notion as I seed him in the corner of a first-class carriage. Leastways, if 'tweren't him, 'twere another just like him, and that's summat. No, I ain't seed him this afternoon, and I kept my eyes open, too. He allays gives me half-a-crown, do his Lardship."

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and appeared to think that someone would take the hint and imitate this aristocratic generosity of which he made mention; but Jessie was already arranging with the station-master for a trap, and the resources of Pangbourne had been fully explained to her.

"They call it Whitchurch, miss; but it's a long way from being that—three good miles upon the Henley road, and nearer four from where we stand. You'll do well to get a carriage from the Lion. They'll drive you all right, for Mr. Belcher, the proprietor, he's a widower. I'd drive you myself in my pony-trap if it wasn't that I'm on duty here. Pleasure and platforms don't go very well together, I assure you."

Jessie thanked him with a glance which was like a match to a bundle of straw; and very few minutes elapsed before she found herself by the side of a merry, red-faced man, who drove, in the fitness of things, a red-wheeled dog-cart and a chestnut mare.

This bibulous individual, having cast upon her an approving eye, and tucked her up in an unnecessary rug, was good enough to explain what he knew of Lord Eastry.

"His Lordship—do I know 'im? Well, somewhat, young lady—somewhat. Why, him and me came home from Epsom together only last Oaks, and precious dicky the pair of us was. Who drove the mare that night I really could not say. When I come to, I was half-way to Oxford, and his Lordship, he was singing hymns in a ditch. They found the mare on the Common at Greys, standing just like a lamb, she was, and no more damage than a broken lamp. Ay, miss; Providence is no teetotaler, you take my word for it. There's good liquor upstairs and silver taps. I tell the parson so when we meet, but bless you, parsons have no sense, not as much as my cow—and that's precious little."

He chuckled at such a pretty notion, and went on to address the mare in those terms of endearment common to ostlers, so that she became in turn "my dear," "my pretty beauty," "vixen," and even "she devil." Driving at a break-neck speed across the wooden bridge to Whitchurch, his eloquence took a new turn, when he reined in to point out to Jessie some of the beauties of reach and river and all that splendid woodland scene.

"Yonder's Mapledurham," he said. "Pretty place, ain't it? They have good 'osses at that house between the trees there, and look like breeding winners. There's a little place above bridge which might suit

you, lady, if you are thinking of settling down here. We see a lot of your countrymen, and queer customers they are, I must say. Don't you believe what's written about Americans throwing their money away. I've been looking for a Yankee that did that for the last ten years, and I haven't come across him yet. Why, two of 'em brought a motor-car into my yard the other day—a stinking bit of tin kettle—and they gave my man sixpence, they did. If it wasn't for their women folk, I wouldn't have 'em in the place; but, Lord, you can't resist the women. There was a bit of a girl, just such another as you, stayed three weeks with me in June, and I'm dashed if I know whether it was my house or hers at the end of it. Observing that I'm a widower with four children, it do make a difference, don't it? Why, for all that I can do, them four babies might fall into the river this very minute, and me be no wiser. A woman about the house is all the difference. What I say is that a man owes it to a good woman's memory not to bring another home for six months after she's dead and gone. But there—I suppose I am peculiar; at least folks say I am."

Jessie was not as responsive as she might have been; and for that matter but a little pressure would have compelled her to admit that Mr. Belcher was exceedingly peculiar. The real truth was that the river's enchanting view claimed all her interest for the moment, and aided her to forget even Holly Lodge and the mission upon which she was going. It was now half-past six of the summer's day, and the sun had begun to go down in a vast black cloud which loomed

up over the western hills. The gentle breeze of the forenoon had entirely died away, and there was in its place that monitory stillness of the atmosphere, broken by those fitful moaning gusts of wind which betoken storm. While the river towards Reading peeped out in a mist of light, gold and crimson and entrancing, the great sweep towards Goring lay black and distinct in the shadow of a storm which enveloped it. And thus the picture was one of contrasts; upon the one side of the bridge a scene of summer's even-tide, the lagging punt, oars plied with lazy hands, the anchored barge, the steaming launch; upon the other, men rowing their best to race the clouds and win a shelter. Swift as tempest ever is, this changing scene took the red-faced man entirely by surprise, and interrupted his bibulous reverie.

"Why, look at that now," he ejaculated, while he whipped up the mare and put her at her best speed. Who'd have thought as the day was going down in thunder? We'll have it wet, miss, and plenty of it. You ain't exactly waterproof, are you, now? Well, I have a couple of sacks, and they're better than nothing at all, as you'll find out presently."

He exhorted the willing mare with new endearments, and for a little while they sped along the road at a splendid speed. Out upon the hilltop the western sky presented a broader face to them, and they perceived its long range of gold-capped cloud; here shaped fantastically as a sea of giant billows; there hewed out in peak and mountain of unbroken blackness. All the forewarning gloom of tempest was in the air as they

drove. The cattle ceased to graze, and gathered in restless groups beneath the shivering trees; sheep halted stolidly, waiting for a leader; farmers passing in their carts nodded their heads toward the west and said, "It's coming by-and-by." All things were falsely coloured or distorted weirdly against that curtain of darkness.

Jessie cared little for the weather, and now that she had left the river, her thoughts turned more surely to Holly Lodge and its master. She had not paid much attention to the various surmises of the loquacious officials at the station; but here on the silent road she remembered them, and could ask herself what they meant. If Gerald had gone to London to-day, then the image in the mirror lost its odd mystery; but just as this solved one of her difficulties, so it emphasised another; for if Gerald were in town, how came she to receive a telegram from Whitchurch, or, again, why had he avoided her? And why were no questions asked by him at the bureau of the hotel? His message had been just such a declaration as she had expected; but that line which said "Unable to get to you" mystified her altogether. What did he mean by saying that he was unable to get to her when a porter had seen him in a train for London? She could make nothing of this maze of perplexities. Now that she was so near to her journey's end she might well ask if wisdom or folly had sent her forth; and her calmer moments reminded her that this act might be her farewell to Murray, the eloquent expression of her choice. And at this all her love for him, her sense of gratitude

and womanly recognition, came to reproach her with new and pathetic doubts. She had no certain purpose, no sure will to guide her to a determined end; but blindly, as a leaf blown by the wind, she drifted upon this stream of destiny, while minute by minute the journey drew to its end, the fateful hour approached, until Holly Lodge was at last discerned and the red-faced man uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"We'll do it yet, lady," he said, with a new flourish of his whip and a "Bravo, old girl!" to his willing mare. "Yonder's the house. You'll be having your tea before the storm bursts. Don't you think about me now; it 'ud take a precious lot of water to harm me, leastwise when it ain't applied inside. I shall just get back comfortable in time for a bit of supper; and there, I'm sure it's a pleasure to have you beside me. Next time you come Pangbourne way you send a letter to Tom Belcher and I'll have the gig at the station—leastways, if his Lordship isn't there before me."

He chuckled again at the delicate compliment, and being encouraged by her pretty expression of thanks, he made bold to ask another question.

"You're no relation of his Lordship's, now? There ain't no likeness that I can see, if you will forgive my freedom. That's what I have been asking myself all the way, 'Is she one of his Lordship's sisters?' and I have said, 'No, she ain't.' That's what I have said."

Jessie answered with a laugh."

"No, I am not his sister; I am his *fiancée*."

"His what, miss? Excuse me, but I didn't exactly catch it."

"His *fiancée*," repeated Jessie. "I am going to marry him, you know."

Mr. Belcher pulled the willing mare back upon her haunches with such violence that he nearly flung his passenger from her seat.

"Say that again," he ejaculated; "you are going to do what?"

"To marry him—perhaps," replied Jessie, with a necessary qualification.

For fully a minute the red-faced man sat without uttering a single word; then with a low, mysterious laugh he touched up the mare and drove her almost at a gallop to the Lodge gates.

"Ah!" he said, as he helped her down. "You'll have your bit of fun, now, won't you? Well, well, it is in the sex, and it do amuse the men to hear it. Good-night, miss. It's been a pleasure to see your pretty face."

"Won't you have a glass of wine or something?" suggested Jessie a little timidly, as she stood upon the grass by the cottage door; and then, to encourage him, she added, "I'm sure Lord Eastray would wish it."

"I thank you, miss, but I'm better at home, and an inn do seem more familiar to me than a private house any day. Here's the rain coming, too, so I'll bide in the cart. Give his Lordship my respects and say I've been before him this time. I wish you good-night, lady, and good luck to you."

He waved a fat hand as he drove back rapidly toward Pangbourne, and continued to do so until a turn of the lane hid her from his sight. Not until the

sound of wheels had quite died away did Jessie, her heart beating a little wildly and her nerves high-strung, push open the green gate of Holly Lodge and advance with some hesitation to its narrow porch. The cottage itself was wildly picturesque—a one-storeyed, straggling building, with honeysuckle running in odorous boughs above its windows, and all that luxuriant foliage of lawn and garden which is the sure memorial to generations of dead gardeners. Situated upon a spur of the hills, the ground fell away toward the river at its rear; and here nestled a tidy orchard, wherein the fruitful trees were already bent with their burden, and the grass grew long and dank. A diminutive stable—a perfect match for this box of a place—stood in a line with the façade of the cottage; and upon the left hand there grew a thicket of trees, whose heavy boughs bent down towards the valley as though to cast their shadow even to the river's bank. Such a haven, remote from life and all that for which a man like Gerald might be expected to care, appeared to Jessie singularly ill-chosen, at least from the man's point of view. Not a sound came from the cottage; no dog barked a welcome; no smoke loomed above the old-time chimneys. Nevertheless, it was the very pink of perfection, and its windows, curtained with dimity, its smart white paint, the freshly trimmed borders of its flower beds, its lovely paths and delightful lawns, were the surest witnesses to care and occupation.

Jessie knocked timidly at the quaint green door, and then was almost sorry she had done so, for the echoing sounds scared the pigeons from their cot and awak-

ened watch-dogs in neighbouring cottages. No answer was vouchsafed from the house itself, however, and a full five minutes passed in this suspense, while the big drops began to fall from the lowering sky, and the whisper of the coming storm already made itself heard in the thicket.

A smart parlourmaid, who tied on her apron as she stood at the door, responded at last to repeated knocking; and, opening the door cautiously, as though afraid of beggars, she asked Jessie her business.

"I want to see Lord Eastry, please; I understand that he lives here."

The maid opened the door a little wider and looked at Jessie very curiously.

"You've come from London, I think, miss, haven't you?" she asked a little suspiciously.

"Yes, yes," said Jessie; "I am Miss Golding. Lord Eastry sent me a telegram."

The maid, still a little doubtful, allowed Jessie to enter a narrow hall, at the end of which she espied a little conservatory well stocked with flowering plants and ablaze with colour. There was no sign of any occupant, however, and the maid continued to be ambiguous, when she opened a neighbouring door and invited Jessie to enter.

"I will tell them, miss," she said vaguely. "This is the drawing-room, if you will please to wait."

It was an exquisite little room, furnished after the new fashion, with cosy corners in white, and a built-up fireplace, and a French paper of a delicious shade of azure. Cushions and armchairs occupied more

than half the floor space; and there were water-colour sketches upon the walls, and French china of undoubted value in the cabinets. Gerald's own tastes were to be discovered in a multitude of queer old clocks; clocks being the one hobby that he had ever found the energy to patronise. Pretty as the room was, however, Jessie detected that note of precision and middle-class method which is so characteristic of the suburbs and their society. Books upon the table stood in measured piles; no cushion in all the room was displaced; the piano was shut and the music nicely arranged upon its lid. Side by side with the rarest Sèvres would be a two-penny-halfpenny cloisonné vase from a popular emporium; the curtains were common and unworthy of the furniture. A French novel had been tucked away in the music rack, and a copy of a religious book placed conspicuously where every visitor could see it.

The woman's eye missed none of these clues as Jessie waited in the little drawing-room and fell to wondering why she was there, and how she had persuaded herself to leave London. A more chilling reception she could not imagine—the half-dark room, the interval, the silence of the house, the strange manner of the trim parlourmaid. And where was Gerald? What was he doing? What had the telegram meant? Clearly he was not in the cottage; for had he been, the insult were the most marked and pointed Jessie could imagine. But she would not so much as contemplate it, and she tried to convince herself that he had been called away suddenly, and that one of his

relatives would receive her and explain. Such a consolation, however, went but a little way, and Jessie became aware of a curious depression of spirits such as she had rarely known before—a sense of isolation, affront, and deliberate neglect, which galled her pride and left her defiant and well prepared for any eventuality. How different the welcome she had pictured to herself when she set out from Paddington! Gerald at the station, or, if not, then someone to receive her in his place; the mutual congratulations, the ardent expression of his gladness. And the reality—this room and the dark, cold sky without, and the rain dripping upon the rose bushes, and the moaning winds of storm.

If Gerald was not there at all! If she were waiting for some loquacious housekeeper who had been “down the garden” when she called—some substantial dame awakened from “forty winks” to offer her master’s apologies! Jessie began to think it must be that. She would have returned without word or message but for the torrential rain which now burst upon road and garden, and went eddying down the gullies in rich brown streams; and, moreover, since the red-faced man had doubtless made the best of his way back to Pangbourne, she must contemplate a four-mile walk through the downpour or remain where she was. Jessie determined to sit still; at least the sleeping housekeeper would show her hospitality.

Another quarter of an hour passed in this dismal speculation. The rain-storm gathered strength every moment, the darkness deepened, when, without any warning, Jessie became aware that someone had en-

tered the room and stood hidden by the screen about its door. She rose to her feet at once and advanced a step, but the sudden flash of the electric light half-blinded her, and while she shielded her eyes from the glare a pleasant girlish voice greeted her and apologised for the delay.

"You're Miss Golding, aren't you? Well, Gerald's in London, and I don't expect him back to-night."

"You don't expect him back?" gasped Jessie. "But he sent me a telegram—he asked me to come."

The girl nodded her head, while the suspicion of a smile appeared in her eyes. She was undoubtedly handsome—a tall brunette, with clear-cut, almost Grecian features, and a crown of black hair brought round becomingly from her forehead until its ends were joined in a heavy "knob" upon her shoulders. In spite of her natural advantages, her shapely figure, the well-rounded arms, and the delicate contour of neck and shoulder, it was impossible wholly to admire her or to admit her charm without qualification. Jessie attributed this difficulty to the heightened and quite unnecessary artificiality of lips and eyes and cheeks, which were rouged and blackened and powdered with little skill, and gave her a stamp of an exceedingly undesirable kind. Moreover, although she was alone in the cottage, she wore a "driving-out" costume, while her breast and fingers were loaded with jewels, and she carried diamonds of considerable size in her ears. Had she met her anywhere else but in Gerald's house, Jessie would have named her for an actress from one of the "variety" theatres—perhaps a

dancer, or at least a prominent figure in the company ; but, as it was, she knew not what to make of it. And so the two stood face to face, and each lacked an idea to begin with.

"I'm afraid you've had a very wet journey," the girl began presently. "You'll have a worse going back, and no cabs to be got. I'm almost sorry you came now."

Jessie's eyes opened wide in wonder and surprise.

"But—but Gerald sent for me! Where is he? What does it mean? I don't understand things at all."

The girl laughed a little insultingly. Making herself at her ease, she looked Jessie up and down with all the insolence she could command.

"No, but you'll understand it presently," was her next remark. "You see, it wasn't Gerald's telegram at all—it was mine. I wanted to see you, my dear ; I wanted to see the girl he *was* going to marry. Why shouldn't I if I want to? No, don't look like that—I don't care twopence, you know. Gerald will laugh when I tell him. He's got to laugh if I say so. Oh, you are pretty enough, and rich, they say. Well, you've come too late. Look at that, you American beauty. He's got something that's English, don't you know ; and she's going to stick to him through thick and thin."

She held out her hand and showed the wedding ring, thick and heavy and conspicuous amid her jewels. Jessie did not ask a single question. She did not lose her dignity, but her flashing eyes, her face,

white as marble in the glare of the light, drove the woman back; and so in stately silence she left the house.

His wife—the woman was his wife!

Jessie believed that she would never forget the shame of that hour until the end of her life.

CHAPTER XX

THE DERELICT

JESSIE closed the garden gate behind her, and, with one defiant look at the house she had left, she set out quickly toward the river and the station. Though the rain fell in a drenching torrent, and the wind blew shrill and cold, she was quite indifferent to her surroundings, and almost oblivious of them. The insult, surpassing all belief in its womanly vindictiveness, left her incapable of any resolution, and she had but one idea—to reach London as quickly as possible, and there to find her father and return to America with him. Of a passionate nature herself, she contemplated a hundred acts which should avenge her and punish this cruel deed. It was so like a woman, she said again and again—the petty spite, the cunning stratagem, and this shadow of a triumph. If she had any consolation, it was that her father would know how to deal with them, and that she might well leave the affair to him. For the rest, she asked herself if a girl had ever been placed in such a situation before—out upon a lonely road, driven from the house of the man she was to marry, wet and weary and hungry. Jessie could almost laugh for the pity of it. She had not the remotest idea where she would lay her head that night;

the lonely road seemed interminable, the darkness was like a veil upon the land. She could scarcely see her hand before her face.

It had been so fine a day when she left the Savoy Hotel that she had brought no cloak with her, and her dress was but a pretty, fragile, muslin gown, which the rain soaked and the mud stained until it quickly became unrecognisable. The great French hat with the pink feather—one of those Murray had bought her at Liverpool—drooped more and more until it was like a drenched flower, and the wet coming through upon her flaxen hair straightened out her curls and aided her to a sense of misery. Trudge, trudge, trudge upon the muddy path she went, sometimes counting her steps, sometimes listening for any sound of steps behind her; but always longing for lights and voices and the shelter the bleak road denied her so pitilessly. Of those she passed, two were labourers with sacks upon their shoulders. They gave her a bluff good-night; but the darkness hid her figure from them, and they did not recognise her for a stranger to the place. A little later on she nearly stumbled upon a hay-waggon, whose driver was asleep and would not wake until the light of some way-side "public" should beckon him to beer and the ingle. She would have given much for the shelter of his hay, but she did not know how far it might be to Henley; and she pushed on with failing courage and heavy heart, and tears gathering in her pretty eyes. Even the other woman had not meant to punish her so terribly. And for what was she punished? For becoming

the betrothed of a man who thus had mourned her in a cottage remote with one who, it might be, had long been entitled to his protection and name. Jessie summoned all her resolution anew when she thought of this. Her step was lighter; her anger gave her strength. She would reach London if she died when she got there.

It was very dark, so dark that she could not even see the trees which swayed and rustled above her. From time to time, through a gap of the blackthorn hedge, she beheld the western sky, heavy at its zenith with rolling cloud, but lighter upon its horizon in a great circle of weird and golden-grey light which marked the river's path. The storm would pass anon, she said; and she thought that if the rain would but cease and the darkness lift, the way might be less dreadful, and her own trouble but a little thing. In this new hope she walked yet another mile, until at a turn of the road she perceived suddenly a great beam of crimson light flashing upon the path and heard the music of a smith's hammer. She had never heard a sound so sweet in all her life; there would be fire and warmth in that cozy cottage surely. Jessie almost ran to its door, and her sudden apparition before an astonished group was remembered for many a day at the forge by Greys.

Jacob, the smith, aided by a very small boy, and watched by Bubble, the village wit, who was a rare man at what he called "a supervision of labour," was, at the moment of Jessie's entrance, in the very act of forging the broken axle of a dog-cart, and explaining

to Bubble the exact nature of the operation. A man of much Scriptural knowledge and a light of a neighbouring conventicle, Jacob invariably salted his dialogues with many fine illustrations drawn from Holy Writ and the "Pilgrim's Progress," the two volumes in his all-sufficient library; and this he did to the rhythm of a lively hammer and the play of immense brown arms.

"There's a job for you, Mr. Bubble,—a better bit of work I never want to see. What says the Book? 'The seats of the mighty shall be cast down.' You'd look precious silly if you came down with the cart on top of you some Saturday morning, wouldn't you, now? Ay, I'd answer for that—and market day, too. Just turn her about, lad, and show me the other cheek. I'll have a slap at it, Christian man that I am."

He raised his hammer, but it did not fall. The figure upon the threshold, the white, wan face, the sodden clothes, the clear musical voice, arrested the blow and found him staring with astonished eyes.

"Can I shelter here from the storm, please? I am so wet and tired. Will you let me sit by your fire a little while?"

"Why, God bless me," cried Mr. Bubble, "if it isn't a lady! Oh dear, oh dear! What a plight you be in, too! Do you walk in, lady, and make yourself comfortable. To think of anyone being out on a night like this!"

"'And the waters rose up over the earth,' " said the smith, still gaping in amazement. "Here, Billy, do you run off and tell your mother that there's a

stranger within the gate—a young lady in a rare pickle. Now, then, off you get, before I put my stick across your back.”

Billy ran away as fast as a lad's legs would carry him, while Jessie stood before the forge and spread her dripping garments to the blaze. Perhaps the humour of her situation appealed to her more than the pathos of it. She began to laugh quietly to herself, and fell unconsciously into that native idiom of which England had almost robbed her.

“I suppose you mean to fix me up,” she said, while the smith worked his bellows to give her warmth, and Mr. Bubble eyed her with some little suspicion. “It's very good of you, and I shall not forget it. I'm from America, you know, and I'm going back in a few days' time. You're the village blacksmith, are you not? Well, I've read about you in books, and I'm glad to have seen you. We haven't got any villages in America—they're all cities. This would be Smiths' City, out our way, and your friend there, he'd be the bar-keeper.”

“Madame,” said Mr. Bubble, a little nettled, “it is forty-two years since I entered a public-house, thank God.”

The smith nodded his head, and would have chosen a text proper to the occasion, but as he could not remember one wholly applicable, he turned the subject adroitly.

“They pay big wages, I do hear, out your way, miss, and the labourer he's just as good a man as the squire. That's queer doctrine to my mind, for what's

the good of equality on fourteen shillings a week? What would Bubble and me do in the squire's drawing-room if he asked us there? 'Sit thou at my right hand.' I tell ee, I should go hot and cold all over. It's what you're born to as makes a chap. I dare to say now as your father could buy the best house in this village and not deny himself particular. Well, and here you are, wet through like any village drab, and the rain no respecter of persons at all. 'Tis a lesson, surely, and one you won't forget."

"She'll forget it in an hour," interposed Bubble a little acidly. "Give her a warm frock and a mug of tea, and you try her. Young women have short memories. You get over the other side of the fire, Jack, for here's your missis coming."

The smith, who wielded the best hammer in Oxfordshire, skipped round the forge like a lamb; he had no Scriptural injunction whatever for the slim, shrewish woman who now made her appearance in the smithy. This personage, scenting gold for her pains, took instant possession of Jessie and carried her off to a neighbouring cottage, with a salvo of derisive abuse for the men, which left them speechless.

"Here you, Bubble, you take yourself off before I do you a mischief. Hasn't that man of mine enough to do that he's to listen to your gibberish? Out you get, and tell your poor wife I sent you. She wouldn't have been three years on a sick bed if she'd had a man and not a monkey for a husband. I've no patience with the pair of you. . . . Don't talk to me. . . . Standing there for all the world like a great

booby, while this poor lady is perishing with the cold. Do you come with me, my dear, and I'll find you some of my darter's clothes. You're as alike as two pins, though I shouldn't be the one to say it. 'Tis Providence that sent you to this house to-night."

She hurried across the road, taking the opportunity to tell Jessie that if she were not a little "sharp" with Jacob, she could never manage him at all; and so soon as they had entered her cottage, which proved to be the very perfection of neatness and good order, she insisted upon stripping the derelict to the skin, and in dressing her anew in a series of garments of irreproachable cleanliness if humble quality.

"My darter Jane, she was three years with the late Lord Wesley at Calthorpe, miss, and these be her clothes. She do think as she will marry at Michaelmas, and this be a sort of trussay. But young men's different to my time, and no girl's safe until the ring be on her finger. Just you put on that lilac frock. You can give her another if harm come to it, I dessay. And it's a duty and a pleasure, I'm sure, to help a young lady like you that will be having a husband of your own some day."

"I shall never have anything so dreadful, I hope," said Jessie, with a laugh. So far as she could see, the lilac gown fitted her to perfection, and was far from unbecoming. The whole adventure began, moreover, to interest her; and now that she was warm and dry, and the good woman set a steaming mug of tea, with honest slices of thick bread and butter before her, she could forget the insult and reflect only upon the story

of it. Gerald was married, then. The fact did not displease her.

"You are very kind to me," she repeated, sitting down at the table and eating with splendid appetite. "I did feel so miserable upon that dreadful road, and now I'm so happy. You must let me send your daughter a wedding present and something for you to remember me by. I am going back to London to-night, if I can, and I sail for America next week. But I shall write to you before I leave England, to tell you how I got on. I could never forget how good you have been."

Mrs. Jacob protested that it was a pleasure; but she doubted Jessie's getting back to London that night.

"The last train goes at nine o'clock, and it will be ten before you walk into Pangbourne, miss. You mustn't think about London to-night. Mr. Kingston, at the Dove, he'll look after you and make you comfortable, I'm sure; and that lazy man of mine shall go down with you if you're afraid of the road. It's a lonesome way, I must say, and queer characters about this harvest time."

Jessie avowed that she was not a bit afraid, and the sharp-sighted woman, who foresaw that Jacob rather than herself might be the recipient of the stranger's bounty, acquiesced in her desire to go alone. When they parted half an hour later, a five-pound note was safely stowed in Mrs. Jacob's reticule; but to Jacob she said that the lady had left a "few shillings" for the "accommodation," and would write to-morrow. It was then a superb summer's night, with a full moon

of harvest and a zenith of radiant stars ; and as Jessie set off at a brisk walk toward the valley, quite a new sense of happiness accompanied her, and she seemed to be leaving behind some old way of life for an unknown but not unpleasant path.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SPECIAL, AND AFTERWARDS

THE rain was still glistening upon the windows of the carriages, the engine laboured in a cloud of white steam, when the last night train from Paddington steamed into Pangbourne station, and a solitary passenger stepped from a first-class carriage and looked about for any person willing to give him the assistance he needed. Espying the spruce station-master of whom we have already made mention, the stranger addressed him at once in a question he had heard before that very afternoon.

"To Holly Lodge, Lord Easry's place—how far, station-master?"

The station-master, pausing to swing his lantern three times in the air, whereby he signified that the train might proceed, laughed softly when he answered his interrogator.

"Why, sir," said he, "I've been asked that before to-day."

The stranger nodded his head as though very satisfied with this response, and went on more confidently—

"I am perfectly aware of it. You were asked by a young lady who arrived by the six o'clock train.

She wore a grey dress and a big straw hat. Am I a prophet after the event?"

The station-master had little acquaintance with prophets, anticipatory or meretricious, so he simply said—

"I don't know about that, sir, but you're right about the lady. It was the six o'clock, and she did wear a straw hat. A remarkably pretty face, sir. She's gone on to Holly Lodge with Mr. Belcher, of the Lion. I looked for her to catch the last train, but she missed it. She won't be going to London now—not by our company's line, sir."

Murray West—for he was the stranger—buttoned a light cape about his shoulders and lit a big cigar with the air of a man who knew quite well what he had to do, and was in no particular hurry to do it.

"You were going to tell me how far it was to Holly Lodge when I interrupted you," he suggested; and then, before he could be answered, he added—

"There are traps to be had, of course?"

The question and the possible profit of its answer raised the station-master's spirits considerably.

"Why, now you've come to it," he rejoined pleasantly, "I do believe the only trap in Pangbourne, except mine, has gone on the Henley road to-night. It is a matter of nearly four mile to the Lodge, and dirty walking, sir. If you think that you could manage my pony——"

"Manage him? Is he a zebra, then? Good Lord, man, if there's a pony in Oxfordshire I can't manage, I'll give you fifty pounds. Please put him to at once.

I'll pay you for the damage; and let me see—when is the next train to Chippenham?"

The station-master shook his head. This was a more commonplace thing.

"There is no train to Chippenham, sir, not this night. They used to let us stop the mail to pick up passengers, but that's done with. You'll have to wait for the five o'clock from Paddington."

Murray brushed aside the suggestion with kindly contempt.

"My good man," he exclaimed, "do I look like a person who waits for the five o'clock from Paddington? If you mean that I must order a special, say so at once, and let it be here in an hour's time."

It is a very unusual thing for a special train to be ordered at so small a station as Pangbourne; but the spruce station-master was far too good a railway servant to express the least astonishment.

"Certainly," he said, just as though he had been asked for a box of matches. "I'll wire to Didcot this minute, sir. It'll cost you—but I don't suppose you care very much what it costs."

"Not a dime," said Murray. "Have the train in the siding when I come back. And now, if you please, for a glimpse of this wild animal of yours. What does he do—eh? Kick—shy—bite? A regular little Welsh devil who bolts like a hare, I suppose. Well, I'll have to talk to him. Lead on."

He strode from the station, impatience driving him as he walked, and the spruce station-master followed at his heel, trying to put a story together as he went.

The man was a little anxious about his pony, but he had already come to the conclusion that it was impossible to say "no" to this domineering and quite masterful personality—and, after all, the damage would be paid for.

"The pony's quiet enough, sir," he explained, while he led the way to the stable, and lit a lantern at its door. "It isn't no vice that I'm speaking of, but he's got a nasty habit of lying down in the middle of the road—and, you see, that's awkward, if you're pressed for time. Perhaps he won't do it to-night, since the weather's sharp." And then to his pony he said, "Up now, Bobby, up, boy, here's a gentleman come to go along with you."

Five minutes passed in the process of harnessing this creature of an amiable weakness, and three minutes more in the necessary directions. As Murray drove off he cried back a suggestion to the station-master, and they parted with a laugh.

"Look here, now. When this pony of yours sits down, what do you do with him?"

"Oh! I read a book, sir."

"Ah! want of firmness. Next time he does it, you sit on his head and read your book there. Imagine you are in a free library. He'll get up quick enough, I promise you."

He gave the brute his head, and handling the reins like a master, they presently went swinging away together through the silent village street; nor did the pony evince the smallest desire to sit and enjoy their superb environment as they clattered over the wooden

bridge by Whitchurch, and so found themselves upon the road to Henley. Every other house that Murray passed was shuttered and lightless by this time. A few laggards in the village inn sat stolidly before their little brown jugs, or raised strident voices to condemn or applaud the government of the day; but the night itself was cold and still, and the radiant moon-beams, searching hill and vale, meadow and thicket, washed out all traces of the storm and disclosed the whole sweetness of that woodland scene. So heavy had the downpour been that the gravel was washed away from the surface of the roads, and the tracks stood up in the moonlight as clear and distinct as a white path upon a southern hillside; while the silence bewitched the traveler, and permitted him in its intervals to catch many a dulcet sound from afar, the barking of a watch-dog, the chime of bells, or the muted railway whistle. The river itself lay like a golden thread at the valley's heart, with the tall poplars for so many sleepy sentinels to guard its moonlight waters, and the fleck of moving lights from launch or house-boat dancing like human fireflies upon its breast. No breath of wind stirred the lazy trees; there was no cloud in all the zenith. Truly a night for dreams and reveries, when a man may lift his eyes to the heavens and ask, in all reverence, of their secrets. Murray would have chosen no better night for the task he had to do.

He suffered the pony to walk up the hill, and for the first time since he had left London he asked himself whither the road was leading him, and why. Full

well he knew the gravity of the issues, and how closely his happiness lay bound up with them. To-night, indeed, would give him all or nothing—would be the beginning of a new day, or the end of his dreams. There upon that Henley road he must find the one human being who held the key of these riddles, who could unlock the gate of happy years to him and bid him forget. Little Jessie—he must find her to-night, for he knew what the day had cost her in shame, in insult, and perhaps in actual suffering; and she had need of him, he said, and no house should shelter him unless it sheltered Jessie also.

This was his watchword, this ceaseless desire for the woman he loved, for the sweetness of her voice, and the touch of her hand; and yet a certain content and sense of rest went with him upon his journey, and he carried himself as one who knew how near to success he stood, and how small the probability was that success could be wrested from him now.

Every object that he espied in the distance, a bush, a shadow, the black shape of a house, could make him start and rein the pony in. It was Jessie—it was not. The night deceived him, and he was over-anxious and weary; and still he knew that she must be upon the road, or even at Holly Lodge, still ignorant of the truth. The infamy of the telegram and the womanly spite which despatched it, moved Murray less than the thought of Jessie's distress. That there is no limit to the petty vindictiveness of a jealous woman he was well aware; but that Jessie, his Jessie, should be the victim of it, that she should be alone in such a place

and at such a time, was a whip of reality to drive him on and quicken every faculty. He must find her without a moment's loss of time; the finest impulse of love and duty spurred him on towards the goal.

There are cross roads a little way beyond the village of Whitchurch, and here for the first time Murray's impatience was not in accord with the amiable pony's disposition. The brute did not, it is true, bear out the spruce station-master's account of his shortcomings; but showing a stubborn dislike to the journey and the manner of it, he stopped of a sudden, and refused to go one yard further upon either road. A little indulgent at first, Murray was content to humour him into compliance; but gentle treatment proving of no effect, he presently gave him a couple of sharp cuts with the whip, and instantly the mischief was done, and the varmint shied into the right-hand road and began to tear down it at a gallop.

Strong as he was, and well acquainted with the devilry of ponies, Murray declared that for power of jaw and indifference to the bit, this pony surpassed any he had known. For full five minutes he could obtain no control over him whatever. Like a whirlwind they went swaying from side to side of the road, now almost in the ditch, now upon the footpath, many times in danger of a complete *débâcle*, which would have brought man and cart and pony down in one broken heap; but always saved by the splendid skill of a masterly horseman; until at last, upon a crest of a steep hill, the brute cried enough, and stood foaming and breathless and entirely cowed. And here

Murray found Jessie, and knew that his journey was done.

She had been coming leisurely down the hillside when she heard the clattering of hoofs and perceived the swaying lamps, and the approaching trap and all its danger. Some instinct, she knew not what, told her that a friend was upon the road; and a suspicion of the great truth coming to her, as such suspicions will, she stood quite still and waited, almost terrified, for the approach of the maddened pony. When the cart stopped, not twenty paces from her, she did not at first move or speak, but advancing a little way into the moonlit road, at length she asked—

“Who is it? What has happened? Is anyone hurt?”

He heard her voice like some sweet sound of music in the night, and, almost afraid to speak, he said—

“It is I—Murray. I have been looking for you, Jessie.”

She did not answer him; her frail figure swayed to and fro helplessly; tears of thankfulness, of love, even of shame, welled up in her eyes. Murray had come to her, then—her Murray. She had known that he would come.

When next she could see anything at all, Jessie looked straight up into Murray’s face, and his strong arm held her close to him.

“You have been to Holly Lodge?”

“Yes, Murray.”

“Then you know the story?”

“Yes, Murray.”

"It is a story of which no single word must ever pass between us again. Come, get into the cart, or this devil will run away again."

She obeyed him in womanly silence, and he turned the pony towards Pangbourne, and set out at a brisk trot. So far he had not so much as noticed Jessie's dress. The print gown, the round straw hat, the shawl about her shoulders, were alike lost upon him; but his hands were burning, and his thoughts ever changing.

"I called at the hotel and learned that you had gone," he said. "Then I met Eastry, and had it out with him. He knows nothing of this. He is a gentleman, anyway. Just think—if this brute had not bolted up the lane with me, I might have driven to Oxford and back again. Well, it had to be; and so we are going home. Do you wish to go home, Jessie—to my home, understand? Do you wish it?"

"Oh, God knows, Murray, how much I wish it."

"Then creep as close to me as you can, and tell me that again. We have a long journey before us, and much to talk about. The railway will be the beginning of it. Are you cold, Jessie? Your dress seems very odd; I don't remember to have seen you in a dress like that before."

"Why, no, Murray; it's a housemaid's dress. I borrowed it at the forge."

"We will send it back to-morrow with something in the pockets. I like it, Jessie. If some of your friends, who make dressmakers' fortunes, would take the hint, you should wear it at Combe Castle. But

they won't. The modern woman has no confidence in herself. She is a patchwork quilt, so to speak, and you never know where the real article begins or leaves off. I like you in that get-up—except the hat. The hat is atrocious, Jessie."

"Why, yes, it is, Murray; but, you see, unless I'd worn the blacksmith's, it was the only hat they'd got. Are you very angry with it, Murray?"

"For spoiling a pretty picture, perhaps. I will frame the sketch myself to-morrow. Here's Whitchurch Bridge, Jessie, and there's our train. Do you know where you are going to? Have you any idea?"

"I haven't the least, Murray. I'm just tired out. Do you know, I think I've walked a hundred miles to-day. And rain—such rain! It was cruel, dear; and I was just alone. I didn't think anyone knew or cared."

Murray laughed softly—almost to himself.

"There has been no day, no hour, no minute, since we parted, when I have not both known and cared, Jessie. Some day I will tell you about it. At present I have to deal with your friend the station-master."

He threw the reins upon the pony's back and sprang lightly to the ground. So firmly did he clasp Jessie in his arms when he lifted her from the cart that those who stood around—Belcher, of the Lion, the nimble boy, the sour-faced porter, and the spruce station-master—might have been so many conspirators against his happiness. There were many nudgings and sly pinches and big-eyed winks before he had set her on the platform; and long afterwards, when

the sour-faced porter was angry, he would pick up his wife and set her down violently, "just like the gentleman from Lunnon treated his young lady."

"She's in," said the station-master officiously, indicating the waiting train thereby. "A saloon and a van; I didn't think you'd want more, sir. They make it out just over fifty pounds and some odd shillings, if you please."

"If you please," repeated Murray, "and I'll write you a cheque in your office."

They entered the office together, while Mr. Belcher sauntered up to the door of the saloon and would have engaged Jessie in conversation.

"So his Lordship weren't at the Lodge, after all," he began. "Well, he do get here and there on that motor-car of his, I must say. Her Ladyship don't like it, they tell me. And no wonder. Must come pretty near to shake the hair off her head sometimes. I hope you didn't get very wet, miss. We might have come home together under one sack if I'd have waited. I thought you were biding the night with 'em; and so, I suppose, you would have been if his Lordship had been at home. Well, well; we're none the worse for a drop of water if it's outside of us—that I always shall say."

He thrust a great hand into the carriage, and taking Jessie's in spite of her hesitation, he asked her a most particular and intimate question.

"About grub, miss—victuals. What have you got aboard here?"

"I really don't know," said Jessie, embarrassed. "I haven't thought of it."

"Aye, but I have. Now you wait a minute. Here, Ben, bring up that basket, my lad. Gently, fathead! Don't you know a whiskey bottle when you see one? There—that's it. These boys," he confided to Jessie in a loud aside, "ain't worth pig's meat, miss. It's the school board, I think. Now you open this when I ain't there to see you. And next time you want a horse and trap in Pangbourne, don't you forget Joe Belcher and the Lion."

It was all very well meant—very surprising—in its way amusing. The dark station, the lumbering engine, the ghostly saloon, the figures moving upon the platform, appealed to Jessie through that sense of doubt and, in a way, of finality which both excited and perplexed her. She knew not, had not the remotest idea, where Murray's home lay or why he carried her there. For her, he continued to be the stern mysterious figure of the steamer's deck; and she remembered, with a strange happiness at the remembrance, that they had called him the "Rogue." Here, tonight, in that little village by the river, she had entrusted her life to this "Rogue's" keeping. She was wondering already what he would do with it.

The "specie" started almost before the ink on Murray's cheque was dry, and the spruce station-master said "Good-night, my Lord," in so loud a tone that Jessie caught the words, and looked up quickly at Murray's face.

"He called you 'my Lord,' Murray," she said laughing.

He answered her—

"I mean to be, Jessie, as soon as Archbishops of Canterbury and other people of marrying habits permit me."

"But I'm a Republican, Murray."

Murray bent and kissed her forehead.

"I care not when you are my sweet wife," he said.

They were alone now. The train rolled at a splendid speed by the river's bank toward Didcot and the West; and, all the restraint and embarrassment of meeting having passed, Murray drew her close to him, and spoke of to-day and its fuller meeting.

"Jessie," he said, "tell me if I am wrong. My friend Laidlaw saw you at the Savoy, did he not?"

She was not surprised by the question, and she answered him at once.

"Yes, he came to see me, Murray."

"And told you all, Jessie?"

She did not know what he meant by "all," and imagining it to be the apology which his friend had offered for him, she answered—

"Yes, he told me all."

Murray leaned back upon his seat and breathed a full breath. He was muttering "Thank God!" This secret which lay between them was a secret no more, then.

"He told you, and you understood," was his next remark; and then he said, "Jessie, I sailed on your steamer for that. You can never lay Lionel's death to this man's account. There are those who know the truth besides ourselves. For your brother's sake——"

"Oh, I understand—I understand!" she cried with

a new radiance upon her face and a heart beating wildly, and all the light of love in her eyes. "It was Herbert Laidlaw, then. You shielded him; he was your friend. Murray, Murray, shall I ever forgive myself? Shall I ever——"

He drew her to him, and hid her face from the light.

"Yes," he said; "Laidlaw was the man, but your brother fired the first shot. Jessie, let that page be closed for ever in your life and mine. I see that a greater Will than ours has decreed this thing. You did not know, and I, thinking that you knew, have told you. It is God's will. I bow to it."

She could not answer him, for the glad tears rained upon her face, and his kisses closed her lips.

CHAPTER XXII

COMBE CASTLE

IT was after midnight when the train steamed in to Chippenham station, but there were footmen in livery upon the platform, and the station-master himself had kept awake to greet the new master of Combe Castle. Quite a little group, in truth, was assembled at the old-fashioned station of that truly old-fashioned town; and its curiosity stood at its zenith when not only the "heir," as they still called him, stepped out among them, but a young and exceedingly pretty girl could be seen at his side. If the young lady's toilet astonished the wiseheads of Chippenham exceedingly—and they gazed at her open-mouthed and dumbfounded—her beauty offered a sufficient apology for the maiden simplicity of her gown; and with a confidential aside from one footman to another that fashions in London had changed since his time, they made way for her in amazed silence. So quick was it all, so rapid the change from light to dark, from the rumble of the train to the comparative quiet of that old-world town, that Jessie neither observed the curiosity she excited nor heard the greetings which passed between Murray and the station-master; and believing herself to be an utter stranger

there, her amazement was considerable when a well-known voice arrested her, and a familiar face peered into her own.

"What! cutting me already? Well, that is a blow, Miss Golding. Don't you remember me on the steamer? I'm Bentham, you know—Percy Bentham, and we got up the collection together."

She knew him now; she held out both her hands to welcome him with a child's gladness.

"Why, it's the 'Bantam!' she exclaimed, regardless of the consequences. "How ever did you get here?"

"Oh! I drove over from the Castle. I'm Lord Woodridge's agent, you know. Must see to things, even the girls. I say, Miss Golding, that's a ripping get-up. Fine, eh, for charades at Christmas? Well, well, that it should be little Jessie. Forgive my freedom, won't you? But, you know, I said I'd tell you something about the 'Rogue,' didn't I—eh? Lord, how wrong you all were! I used to lock myself in my cabin and put my head under the clothes to laugh sometimes. The 'Rogue!' You called him a rogue—the best chap that ever wore clothes. And I played the part because he wished it. Now, really, wasn't it very wrong of you?"

Jessie admitted it all without a blush. It was delightful to find a friend here, and to break through that reserve which so long had attended any conversation about Murray.

"Of course I was wrong!" she cried, laughingly. "I shouldn't be a woman if I understood men first

time. We were all wrong—Mr. Trew more than any of us. I'll tell him so if ever I see him again."

"You'll see him to-morrow," rejoined the "Bantam," with that which he meant to be an amatory leer. "I told him to bring his what-do-you-callers with him—the thing that goes round his neck, you know. Some people might dub it a halter—ha! ha! ha! I only call it the holy bond; but, you see, people groan when I make a joke, so I'm getting serious. Come along, Miss Jessie; here's his Lordship waiting. You mustn't keep him waiting already. There's time for that—ha! ha!"

Mightily pleased with himself, as fresh as a new hat from a bandbox, the "Bantam" skipped up to Murray, and repeated his point with proper emphasis.

"I'm telling Miss Golding that the parson's bringing down the halter. She says she doesn't see it. But she will to-morrow, won't she, Murray? She'll see it to-morrow all right."

Murray tried to look as though the joke amused him greatly, and remarking that the "Bantam's" jokes generally took four and twenty hours for a proper perception of their wit, he led the way to the first of the carriages, and seated himself at Jessie's side. Bentham, with a nice eye for the fitness of opportunity, said that he would bring in the "luggage," and disappeared strategically in the darkness of the station-yard. The two were alone, and they drove swiftly through Chippenham's sleeping streets out beyond the woodlands and the hills.

"Was Mr. Bentham right when he said that we

should see the vicar to-morrow, Murray?" Jessie began by asking.

"Absolutely right," Murray said. "I expect the 'reverend one' first thing, and another of more consequence a little later. Of course, I speak of your father, Jessie. He must come straight to Combe Castle. My telegram is urgent, and will explain all."

"When did you send the telegram, Murray?"

"From Pangbourne station, while the amiable inn-keeper made love to you."

"Then Mr. Bentham knows everything?"

"I have no secrets from Mr. Bentham. He came to America to tell me of my changing fortunes and to bring me home. Like many clever men, he is not to be judged by the words out of his mouth. Apart from obvious aberrations of intellect, he is just the man I want—shrewd, silent in matters that count, and so very loquacious that a secret is quite safe with him because he is always talking of something else. We shall find the 'Bantam' indispensable in these weeks to come when you and I will be at the old place near Ipswich, trying to forget, little Jessie, that any world but our own exists. Combe Castle is only one of my houses; I am the master of many to-day."

She sat a little while thinking over it, then, creeping a little closer to him, she said—

"The Master of Combe Castle—I want to know his name, Murray."

"They call him hereabout the twelfth Lord Woodridge, Jessie."

She did not speak; he did not intrude upon all the

strange thoughts, of glad surprise, of reproach, of wonder that crowded upon her. The road was dark and winding, but the hills beyond it were full of radiant light, and they beckoned her up toward his home at their heart.

This, then, was the gift of Fortune to her—this brave man's friendship, this great name, the homage of his house. Jessie knew not if she dare trust herself to think; and nestling down to him, feeling for his hands, lifting her face to his, she kissed his lips.

"Murray, what shall I say for myself?"

"That you love me, little Jessie."

"I have loved you always. From the first day upon the steamer, until now, you taught me what love meant, Murray. Oh! I could not love you more because of to-night. You will believe that, dearest—you will not think me so base?"

He silenced her, kissing her lips, and drawing her so close to his embrace that she could feel his heart beating.

"I believe nothing except that you love me," he said. "Look up, little wife; there is your home and mine."

The great gates opened wide, the lights of the old house shone full upon them. They passed in together, as pilgrims of the night who had won the goal and would rest.

CHAPTER XXIII

APHRODITE

IN one of the boudoirs of Combe Castle the inquisitive visitor, who can persuade a corrupt housekeeper to permit him to invade the sanctuary, is shown an odd relic, which he will do well to examine with some circumspection. Apparently an old parchment, withered, sun-dried, and almost indecipherable, a closer inspection by the aid of a powerful glass will reveal these words upon this curious document—

“Jessie Golding, subject of the United States, in grave danger on board the steamship *Royal Scot*. Help earnestly besought.”

The parchment is set in a frame of silver, and is crowned with a little image of Aphrodite rising up from the foam of the sea and bearing a ship's figure in her hands. To all that ask her, the sage housekeeper declares that this very document was taken from the sea exactly two months after the present mistress of Combe Castle came to England; but strangers shake their heads and make nothing of the story, while only the well-informed reply, “Yes; her husband sent that message from the *Royal Scot* when he was a prisoner on the sea.” These read the document many times, and the little image puzzles them,

and they make nothing of it, except as a pleasant ornament to an odd fancy.

But whenever Murray reads the paper and Jessie chances to be at his side, he will stand a moment and say—

“Little Aphrodite, there is the deed which gave you to me.”

And Jessie answers—

“It is written on my heart, Murray.”

And they pass out to the new life and the new ways together.

THE END

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